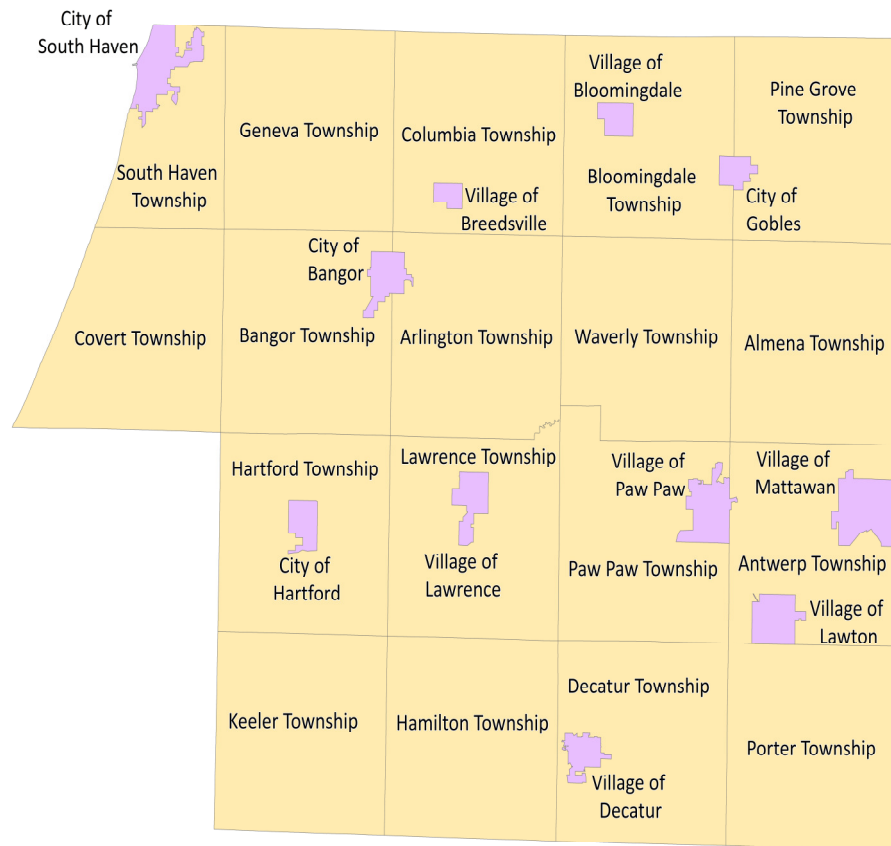


VAN BUREN COUNTY

Master Plan

2013-2017



Written by: The Van Buren County Planning Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Van Buren County Planning Commission has developed the 2013 – 2017 Master Plan to establish goals that, if strived for, will shape and direct the future of Van Buren County, providing a consistent and sustainable land-use pattern in the county. The Plan will focus on the existing conditions and trends within the county and is to be used as a resource for those making land use decisions in Van Buren County. The intent is to provide a process for making decisions and the information necessary to complete that process. The desired outcome is a sustainable development pattern in Van Buren County.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Van Buren County Planning Commission would like to thank the following for assisting in the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan:

- Van Buren Department of Land Services
- Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians
- Van Buren County Planning Commission

Van Buren County Comprehensive Plan Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
LIST OF MAPS	vii
INTRODUCTION	
Historical Setting and County Profile	1
The Need for Planning.....	1
Legal Basis for Comprehensive Planning.....	3
Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.....	4
CHAPTER	
I. Population	6
Population Summary	13
Pokagon Potawatomi.....	15
II. Land Use	18
Future Land Use Map.....	19
Geology	20
Soils.....	22
Topography	24
Hydrologic System.....	26
Watershed Management Plans	26
Wetlands	28
Water Bodies	31
Flood Prone Areas.....	31
Agricultural Lands, Open Space, and Farmland Preservation.....	33
Other Methods of Preservation	37
Purchase of Development Rights.....	39
III. Housing.....	41
IV. Education, Health, and Safety	50
Educational Attainment.....	52
Health and Safety	54
Hospitals	54
Emergency Preparedness.....	54
V. Economic, Labor and Income Profile.....	56
Wages	58
Important Industries.....	59
Unemployment and Poverty	60
Coordinated Economic Development Efforts.....	62

CHAPTER

VI. Community Facilities and Services, Transportation and Recreation.....	63
County Facilities	63
County Courthouse	63
County Jail	64
Courthouse Annex Building.....	64
DHS, Health Department, Mental Health, and Animal Shelter	64
Human Services East Building	65
County Building West.....	65
County Administration/Land Services Building.....	65
Van Buren County Governmental Departments	66
Board of Commissioners	66
Administration	67
Judicial	67
County Clerk	67
Prosecuting Attorney.....	68
Register of Deeds	68
Treasurer.....	68
Drain Commissioner.....	68
Sheriff Department.....	69
State Probation Office	69
Equalization.....	69
Michigan State University Extension	69
Information Services	70
Building and Grounds.....	70
Animal Control.....	70
GIS.....	70
Land Description	70
Human Services	71
Public Transportation	71
Recreation	72
County Museums	72
Van Buren County Fairgrounds.....	72
Trails	72
Camping.....	74
Waterways, Wineries, and More	74
VII. Recommendations and Goals	76
Smart Growth	76
Coordinated Planning Initiatives	77
Education and Training.....	79
REFERENCES	80
APPENDIX	
County PDR Ordinance and Local Program Information	81

List of Tables

1. Van Buren County Distance from Major Cities.....	1
2. Population Change, 1960-2010	6-7
3. 2010 Population Density by Municipality.....	10-11
4. Percent Change in Population by Race, 1990--2010	12
5. Population Projections to 2020	13
6. Housing Occupancy	42
7. Households by Family Type 2010.....	46
8. House Value in Dollars 2010.....	47
9. Income and Benefits (in 2011 inflation adjusted dollars).....	48
9. School Enrollment and Type of School 2010	52
10. Educational Attainment 2010.	52
11. Educational Attainment by Sex/Race	53
12. Employment & Wages by Industry, 2010	56
13. People Working in County in 2010.....	57
14. Inflow/Outflow of Job Counts 2010	57
15. 2007 Census of Agriculture, Van Buren County Profile	58
16. Economic Characteristics of Farms 2007	59
17. Ten Largest Employers in Van Buren County 2012.....	60
18. Percentage of Population below Poverty Level 2010.....	61

List of Figures

1. Land Use Decision Flow Chart..... 4

2. Population Pyramid of Van Buren County in Year 2010 12

3. Age of Total Occupied Housing Stock in Van Buren County 2010..... 41

4. Van Buren County Housing Stock..... 43

5. Median House Value, 1980-2010..... 49

6. Educational Attainment for Population 25+ 53

7. Van Buren County Employment and Wages..... 56

8. Percent of Impoverished Population by Age 2010 60

9. Number of Employees All Industries, Van Buren County..... 61

List of Maps

1. Population Density, 2010	8
2. Percent Population Change , 2000 - 2010	9
3. Classification Map, 2013	19
4. Quarternary Geology, 1982	21
5. Hydric Soils Map	23
6. Topography Map.....	25
7. Hydrologic System	27
8. Wetlands Classification Map.....	30
9. Water Bodies	32
10. Prime Agricultural Soils Map.....	36
11. Population and Households Change 2000 - 2010.....	44
12. Percent Change of Households 2000- 2010	45
13. School District Boundaries.....	50
14. Van Buren Intermediate School Districts	51
15. Van Buren County Community Profile Map	55
16. Van Buren County Commissioner Districts	66

INTRODUCTION

Historical Setting and County Profile

Van Buren County is located in Southwest Michigan bordering on Lake Michigan and Berrien County on the West, Allegan County on the North, Kalamazoo County on the East and Cass County on the South. Van Buren County has a proud history paralleling the story of statehood. Settled for the most part by New York Dutch and New Englanders, it was formed into a County by an Act of the Legislative Council of Michigan and approved October 29, 1829, in the same act that created Cass, Berrien and Kalamazoo Counties. It was not until 1837 that the population of Van Buren County was deemed adequate to justify local self-government. On March 18, 1837, an Act organizing Van Buren County was approved by the Governor of Michigan.

Today, Van Buren County contains 18 townships, 4 cities and 7 villages, with the County seat located in the Village of Paw Paw. The largest city in Van Buren County is South Haven with a population exceeding 5,000. Van Buren County has a land area of 398,887

acres or 623 square miles and its southern boundary is 21 miles from the Indiana State line. Interstate 94, which connects Detroit and Chicago, intersects the County at the midway point between these two major metropolitan areas. Also, the County is within close proximity to the three urban areas of Kalamazoo to the East, Benton Harbor/St. Joseph to the west and Grand Rapids to the north.

Table 1

Van Buren County Distance from Major Cities		
Distance	Miles	KM
Chicago	130	209
Cleveland	285	458
Detroit	160	257
Indianapolis	180	289
Lansing	85	136

Farming is one of the main enterprises in the County as the prevailing winds from Lake Michigan moderate air temperature, making the climate throughout the county favorable for orchard crops and vineyards. In addition, there are over 300 inland lakes and ponds ranging in size from less than 0.1 acre to approximately 300 acres, and the county has 14 miles of shoreline along Lake Michigan. Two minor rivers, the Black River and the Paw Paw River flow through the county as the Black Rivers empties into Lake Michigan at South Haven and the Paw Paw River empties into Paw Paw Lake in Watervliet, located in Berrien County.

The Need for Planning

Land use planning is essential for long-range sustainable growth. Its utilization promotes the health, safety and welfare of a community. Conversely, the lack of planning results in haphazard growth. It leads to problems such as loss of productive farmland, urban core degradation, and increased infrastructure costs. Communities have the responsibility to create an environment with pleasant living conditions now and in the future. This includes in a sustainable pattern of agriculture, commerce and industry, recreation, residences, public facilities and environmentally sensitive areas. Planning, based on an evaluation of existing conditions, provides the process that effectuates this desired land use pattern.

The Van Buren County Planning Commission has three Guiding Statements that provide the basis for why, what, and how the County exercised community planning. They are as follows:

1) Value Statements (Why we want to plan)

- Protect rural character
- Promote sustainable development
- Save unique natural features
- Maintain agricultural heritage
- Demonstrate respect for local control
- Ensure future quality of life

2) Vision Statement (What we want to plan)

- *Van Buren County desires to be a healthy mix of active farms, beautiful natural areas and rural residences surrounding compact vibrant cities and villages with small town charm and modern amenities. The people of Van Buren County are welcoming, cooperative and work together to support community events, preserve and rehabilitate downtowns, cultivate and support new and existing businesses, and support the county's agricultural and natural resources. From the pristine beaches of Lake Michigan and the pure rivers and streams to the lively streets of local downtowns, Van Buren County offers residents and visitors of all ages, access to: modern schools; a broad spectrum of services and transportation options; quality infrastructure; access to fresh foods; parks and recreation facilities; walkable communities; vibrant downtowns; engaging community events and an entrepreneurial culture with abundant employment opportunities..*

3) Mission Statement (How we will reach vision)

It is the mission of the Van Buren County (VBC) Planning Commission (PC) to:

Encourage and facilitate local planning efforts, especially with respect to coordinated planning; emphasize the importance of ongoing education and training for local appointed and elected officials in order to uphold responsible, effective decision-making; help communities understand the need to plan in order to proactively mitigate land-use conflicts, resolve issues, and make development decisions that are predictable, equitable, and cost effective.

To that end, the VBC PC is committed to:

- Promoting consistency, complementation, coordination in land use between and among county, city, village, and township entities through master plan review and coordinated county planning.
- Providing educational opportunities, ideas, and resources to local governmental boards, commissions, committees, and the citizens they serve.
- Helping local units to understand and respond to issues related to urban sprawl.
- Being present and available to local units to respond to local needs.
- Continuing education of its own members to better serve the local units.

Legal Basis for Comprehensive Planning

The Van Buren County Planning Commission reestablished in accordance with Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008, as amended. The members of the Planning Commission are appointed by the County Board of Commissioners and are charged with the responsibilities set forth in the Act to prepare and adopt a county plan. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008 states

MICHIGAN PLANNING ENABLING ACT (EXCERPT) Act 33 of 2008

125.3807 Master plan; adoption, amendment, and implementation by local government; purpose.

Sec. 7.

(1) A local unit of government may adopt, amend, and implement a master plan as provided in this act.

(2) The general purpose of a master plan is to guide and accomplish, in the planning jurisdiction and its environs, development that satisfies all of the following criteria:

(a) Is coordinated, adjusted, harmonious, efficient, and economical.

(b) Considers the character of the planning jurisdiction and its suitability for particular uses, judged in terms of such factors as trends in land and population development.

(c) Will, in accordance with present and future needs, best promote public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare.

(d) Includes, among other things, promotion of or adequate provision for 1 or more of the following:

(i) A system of transportation to lessen congestion on streets and provide for safe and efficient movement of people and goods by motor vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, and other legal users.

(ii) Safety from fire and other dangers.

(iii) Light and air.

(iv) Healthful and convenient distribution of population.

(v) Good civic design and arrangement and wise and efficient expenditure of public funds.

(vi) Public utilities such as sewage disposal and water supply and other public improvements.

(vii) Recreation.

(viii) The use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability.

The statute states that, once having adopted the County Plan, the Planning Commission powers are quite limited with regard to local decision-making. The Commission is given certain powers in reviewing work or projects to be instituted by local Boards, Departments, or Agencies, but has no approval or disapproval powers over such actions by local governments. Therefore, at the County level, planning is a process of evaluating the relationship of local plans to general patterns so that Van Buren County will have development that meets the needs of the present without compromising resources necessary for future generations.

This publication will attempt to provide a process and the content necessary to help local governments develop specific land use objectives compatible with surrounding areas. The process is based on Guiding Principles adopted by the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP, formerly Michigan Society of Planning, or MSP) Officials. Consequently, the General Development Plan is meant to serve as a guide that facilitates land use decisions in Van Buren County. As a result, the County Planning Commission will use this as a tool to meet its mandated advisory role, and it is the hope of the commission that this Plan is a concise guide that assists local governments in their long-range development plans, which promote the health, safety and welfare of all of the residents of Van Buren County.

Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan

The General Development Plan consists of these main elements:

- Introduction
 - Historical Setting and County Profile
 - Implementation of Plan
- Evaluation of Existing Conditions
 - Demographic Information
 - Land Use and the Environment
 - Housing Information
 - Education, Health and Safety
 - Economic Policy, Labor, and Income Profile
 - Community Facilities and Services, Transportation and Recreation
- Recommendations and Goals

The mandated role of the Van Buren County Planning Commission is to assist local planning commissions and the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners in making lawful and sustainable planning decisions. This plan is designed to be a guide to sustainable development, a tool for all to use in weighing the costs and benefits of proposed development. The information and recommendations

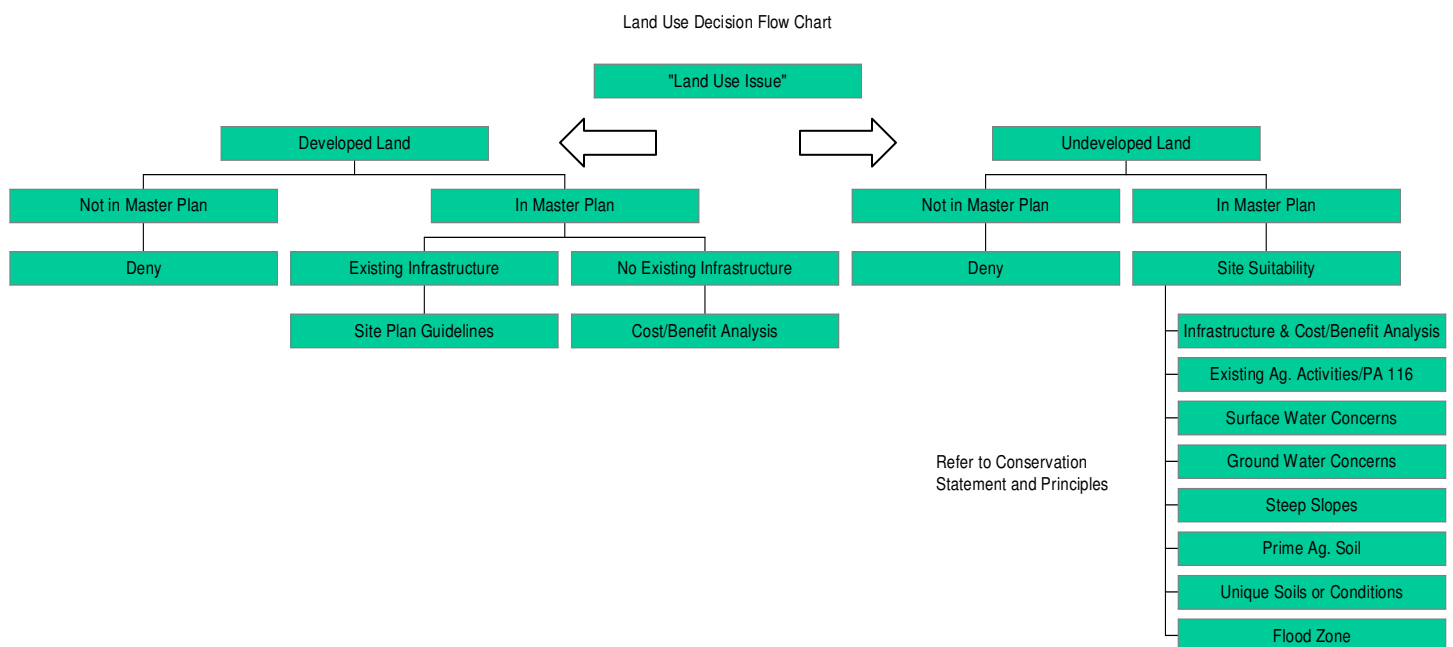
contained in this document together with information set forth in local land use plans will be the basis for recommendations made by the planning commission.

Because the legal authority of the planning commission is limited to an advisory capacity, there is not a future development/land-use plan map included in this plan. The county respects local (township, city, village) control over land use issues and decision making, thus the mandate of the planning commission is to assist and suggest to local decision makers that they utilize a planning process that incorporates the guiding principles of sustainable development as will be mentioned throughout this document. This document provides data that will be helpful to local units and others in developing their own comprehensive plan. More information and data about land use, planning and updated local future land use are available on the Van Buren County web site at vbco.org. This information resource accompanies this document to form a more complete and thorough guide to the development of the county.

The plan advocates the tenets of “Smart Growth” which were adopted by the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council in their final report entitled Michigan’s Land, Michigan’s Future, dated August 15, 2003. The use of these tenets in making recommendations regarding land use decisions will be discussed in Chapter 7 of this document.

Figure 1 shows a suggested land use decision flow chart that can be used by local planning boards as they review requests for changes to the master plan or zoning ordinance.

Figure 1



Chapter 1 Population

For the purpose of the Van Buren County 2013 Master Plan, demographic data has been collected from the 2010 Census. After analyzing the following Census data, the historical demographics of Van Buren County paints a picture of population growth and increasing diversity, but overall growth has slowed or stopped.

Since 1960, the population of Van Buren County has increased by over 50%. What is striking however is not the sheer increase in population from an overall county perspective, but the overwhelming difference from population growth in cities and villages compared to that in the townships. A detailed population growth breakdown is provided in Table 2, below.

Table 2

Population Change 1960-2010							1960-2010	2000-2010
<u>Townships</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>% Change</u>	<u>% Change</u>
Almena	1288	1845	2956	3581	4226	4992	287.58%	18.13%
Antwerp	2456	2312	3910	5039	6298	12182	396.01%	93.43%
Arlington	1392	1645	1884	1929	2075	2073	48.92%	-0.10%
Bangor	1443	1708	1993	1948	2121	2147	48.79%	1.23%
Bloomington	1176	1493	1953	2351	2836	3103	163.86%	9.41%
Columbia	1374	1657	2004	2339	2479	2588	88.36%	4.40%
Covert	2323	2659	2706	2855	3141	2888	24.32%	-8.05%
Decatur	1275	1603	1684	1856	2078	3726	192.24%	79.31%
Geneva	1850	2392	2984	3162	3975	3573	93.14%	-10.11%
Hamilton	1023	1167	1586	1515	1797	1489	45.55%	-17.14%
Hartford	1746	2211	2707	3032	3159	3274	87.51%	3.64%
Keeler	2109	2234	2638	2344	2601	2169	2.84%	-16.61%
Lawrence	1421	1555	2114	2115	2282	3259	129.35%	42.81%
Paw Paw	2067	2592	3207	3645	3738	7041	240.64%	88.36%
Pine Grove	1528	1835	2379	2594	2773	2949	93.00%	6.35%
Porter	1047	1360	2041	2086	2406	2466	135.53%	2.49%
South Haven	2766	3416	4174	4185	4046	3983	44.00%	-1.56%
Waverly	1044	1313	2130	2188	2467	2554	144.64%	3.53%
Subtotal	29328	34997	45050	48764	54498	68466	133.45%	25.63%
<u>Villages</u>								
Bloomington	471	496	537	503	528	454	-3.61%	-14.02%
Breedsville	245	209	244	213	235	199	-18.78%	-15.32%

Decatur	1827	1764	1915	1760	1838	1819	-0.44%	-1.03%
Lawrence	773	790	903	915	1059	996	28.85%	-5.95%
Lawton	1402	1358	1558	1685	1859	1900	35.52%	2.21%
Mattawan	n/a	1569	2143	2456	2536	1997	#VALUE!	-21.25%
Paw Paw	2970	3160	3211	3169	3473	3534	18.99%	1.76%
Subtotal	7688	9346	10511	10701	11528	10899	41.77%	-5.46%

Cities								
Bangor	2109	2050	2001	1922	1933	1885	-12.04%	-4.04%
Gobles	816	801	816	769	815	829	1.59%	1.72%
Hartford	2305	2508	2493	2341	2476	2688	16.62%	8.56%
South Haven	6149	6471	5943	5563	5013	4400	-28.44%	-12.23%
Subtotal	11379	11830	11253	10595	10237	9772	-14.12%	-4.54%
County Total	48395	56173	66814	70060	76263	76258	57.57%	-0.01%

Where 1960 – 2000 showed significant growth in townships and villages, there was loss in population in the City of South Haven and the City of Bangor. The 2010 Census figures demonstrate further decline in these cities, but also shows losses in some villages. There is significant growth in certain townships which is also reflected in the housing figures. Urban sprawl was vastly occurring on the east side of the county until the housing bust of 2008.

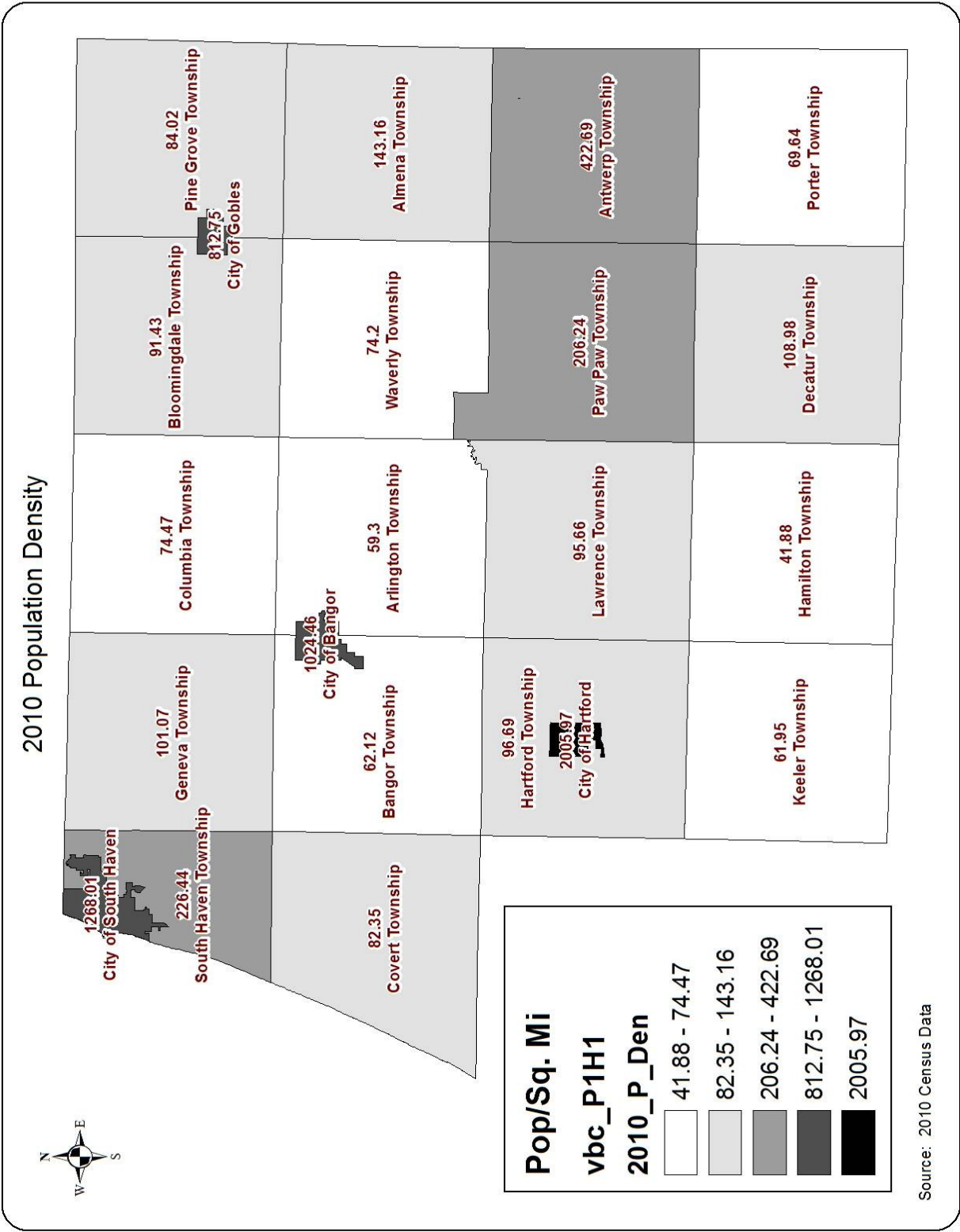
Population density is a commonly compared statistic, which calculates the number of persons per square mile. Map 1 & 2 display the population density of municipalities in Van Buren County for 2000 and 2010, respectively. -Density patterns have changed significantly since 2000. Overall, Van Buren County has a density of about 122.4 persons per square mile (based on 623 sq. mi. area of county)

Population figures can be misleading. Although it appears that Van Buren County only declined five people over a 10 year period, further investigation shows a different picture presently from 2000. Below there are some interesting statistics:

- Van Buren County's population decreased by five people 2000-2010
- There was a 9.3% decline in people aged 17 & under
- There was 2.4% decline in people aged 18-34
- There was a 16% decline in people aged 35-49.
- The number of people aged 50-85 increased 28%
- Hispanic/Latino population grew by over 37%
- Black population declined 23.7%.

These are just a few glaring figures that show how things have changed significantly even though the total number has not. Some factors of these changes may be job loss, out-migration, shift back from manufacturing to agriculture, and high number of bank foreclosures.

Map 1



Map 2

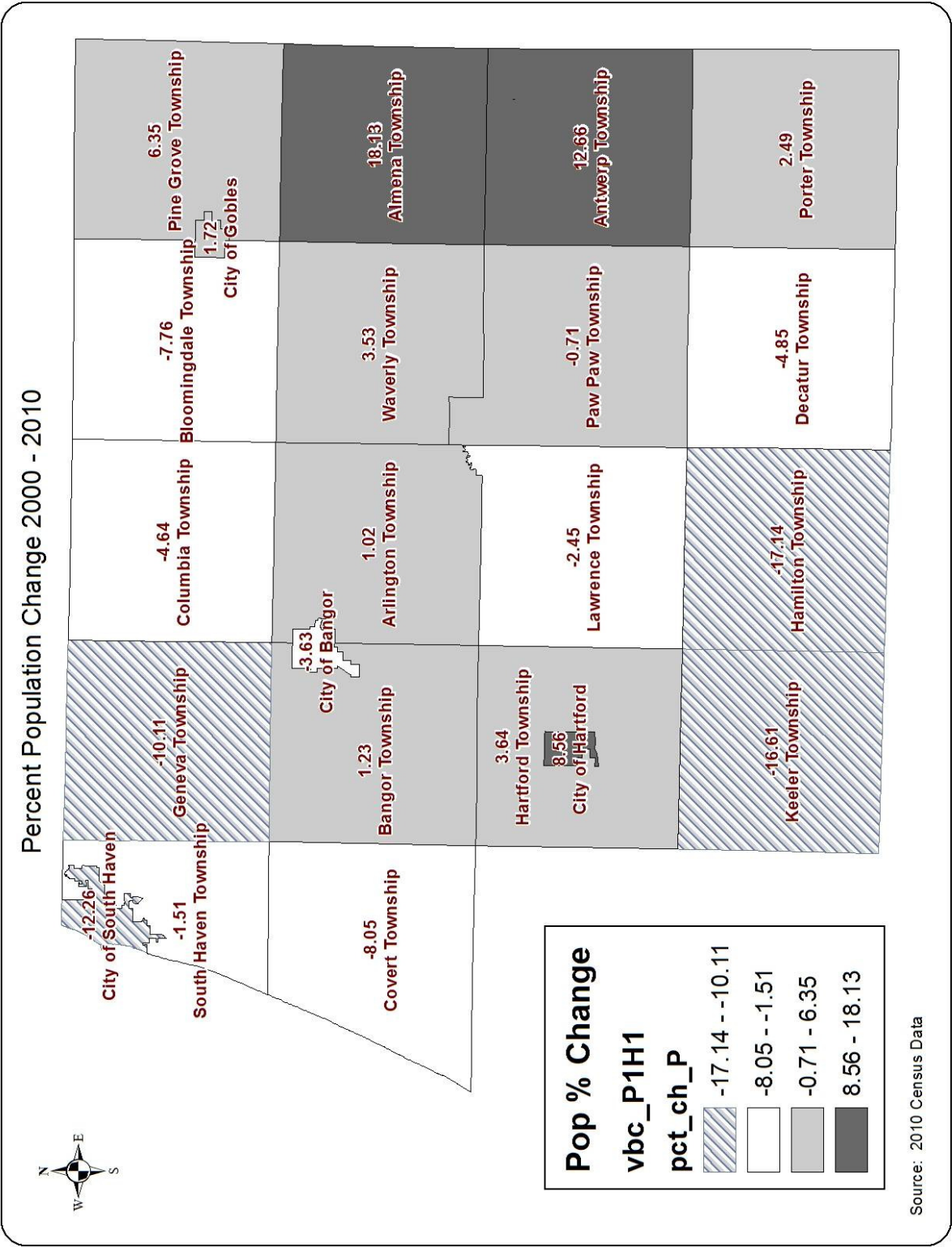


Table 3 provides a detailed numerical breakdown of population density by county municipality:

Table 3

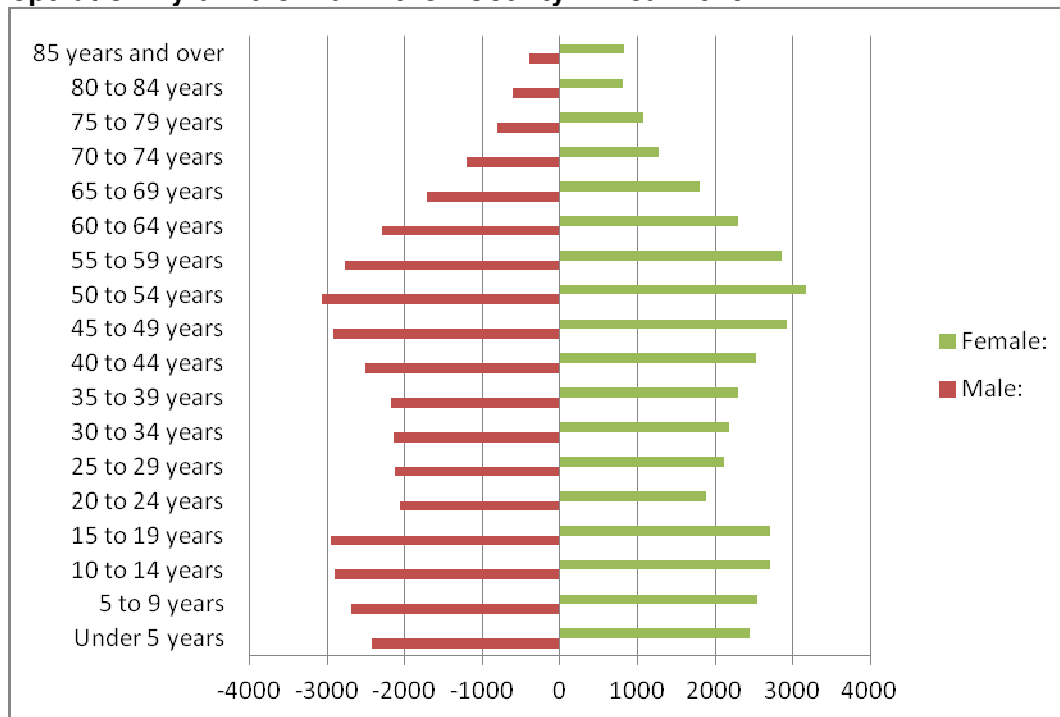
2010 Population/Housing Density by Municipality					
				Density per square mile of land area	
Geographic area	2010 Population	2010 Housing Units	Total Area (Square Miles)	Population 2010 Density	Housing 2010 Density
Van Buren County	76,258	36,785	623.25	122.36	59.02
Almena Township	4,992	1,945	34.87	143.16	55.78
Antwerp Township	12,182	4,737	34.93	348.75	135.61
Lawton Village	1,900	788	2.29	829.69	344.10
Mattawan Village	1,997	873	3.82	522.77	228.53
Paw Paw Village (part)	87	59	0.04	2175.00	1475.00
Remainder of Antwerp Township	8,198	3,017	28.82	284.46	104.68
Arlington Township	2,073	1004	34.96	59.30	28.72
Bangor City	1,885	835	1.84	1024.46	453.80
Bangor Township	2,147	1038	34.56	62.12	30.03
Bloomington Township	3,103	1,576	35.06	88.51	44.95
Bloomington Village	454	208	1.12	405.36	185.71
Remainder of Bloomington Township	2,649	1,368	33.94	78.05	40.31
Columbia Township	2,588	1,511	35.41	73.09	42.67
Breedsville Village	199	80	0.66	301.52	121.21
Remainder of Columbia Township	2,389	1,431	34.75	68.75	41.18
Covert Township	2,888	1,628	35.07	82.35	46.42
Decatur Township	3,726	1,623	35.61	104.63	45.58
Decatur Village	1,819	781	1.42	1280.99	550.00
Remainder of Decatur Township	1,907	842	34.19	55.78	24.63
Geneva Township	3,573	1,569	35.35	101.07	44.38
Gobles City	829	347	1.02	812.75	340.20
Hamilton Township	1,489	728	35.55	41.88	20.48
Hartford City	2,688	1,002	1.34	2005.97	747.76
Hartford Township	3,274	1,335	33.86	96.69	39.43
Keeler Township	2,169	1,629	35.01	61.95	46.53
Lawrence Township	3,259	1,588	35.8	91.03	44.36
Lawrence Village	996	436	1.73	575.72	252.02
Remainder of Lawrence Township	2,263	1,152	34.07	66.42	33.81
Paw Paw Township	7,041	3,505	37.02	190.19	94.68

Paw Paw Village (part)	3,447	1,615	2.88	1196.88	560.76
Remainder of Paw Paw Township	3,594	1,890	34.14	105.27	55.36
Pine Grove Township	2,949	1,259	35.1	84.02	35.87
Porter Township	2,466	1,424	35.41	69.64	40.21
South Haven City (part)	4,400	3,329	3.47	1268.01	959.37
South Haven Charter Township	3,983	2,081	17.59	226.44	118.31
Waverly Township	2,554	1092	34.42	74.20	31.73

The 2010 median age of Van Buren County residents is currently 39.8. This represents an 8.7% increase from the 36.6 in 2000. . A population decrease of the age 30-49 population, paired with the increased numbers in the above 50 brackets clearly are factors of this increase.

A population pyramid can visually explain a great deal about county population. For the purpose of this plan, this population pyramid demonstrates trends in both county age and the gender distribution of the county. When utilizing a population pyramid, we can get a fairly precise distribution and can predict, in a sense, possible age and gender distribution issues for the future.

The population pyramid (Figure 2) shows the relationship between the “dependent” population (under 20 years and over 64 years) and the “economically productive” population (20-64 years). Since 2000 this “dependent population” has increased significantly while there was as loss of top wage earners (30-50). The pyramid shows these increases and could help to further explain some of the statistics we will see in the housing and economic breakdown-

Figure 2**Population Pyramid of Van Buren County in Year 2010**

When representing the gender distribution of Van Buren County, the population pyramid represented in Figure 3 visually displays that overall, the male to female ratio is nearly equal.

A population trend analysis focusing on race demonstrates a large increase in the number of citizens of Hispanic origin and a decrease in African Americans residing in Van Buren County as seen in the Table 4 below.

Table 4

Percent Change in Population by Race, 2000 to 2010			
	2000	2010	% Change
Total Population	76,263	76,258	-0.01%
White	64,466	63,028	-2.23%
African American	3,939	3007	-23.66%
Native American	651	530	-18.59%
Asian & Pac Island	226	300	32.74%
Hispanic Origin	5,634	7,758	37.70%
Other	91	78	-14.29%
Reporting more than one Race	1,256	1557	23.96%

Population projections provide a vision for the future and assist in predicting if county services must be increased to support a growing population. Table 5 displays the 20-year population projections provided by three separate sources:

Table 5

Population Projections to 2020

Date	4/1/2000 Census	4/1/2005	4/1/2010	4/1/2015	4/1/2020	Projected % Change
Population	76,263	79960	81585	83402	85288	11.83%

Sources: US Census 2000, Regional Econometric Model, Inc., 1998

Date	4/1/2000 Census	7/1/2005	7/1/2010	7/1/2015	7/1/2020	Projected % Change
Population	76263	82800	87100	91500	95800	25.62%

Sources: US Census 2000, Michigan Department of Management and Budget

Date	4/1/2000 Census	7/1/2005	7/1/2010	7/1/2015	7/1/2020	Projected % Change
Population	76263	82828	87110	91453	95757	25.56%

Sources: US Census 2000, Michigan State University - Census 2000 Project

As evident from Table 5, all projection sources projected above a double digit percentage increase in population by 2020-with the State of Michigan and Michigan State University predicting a greater than 25% increase in population. It is evident that these projections were off and new data will need to be reviewed.

Population Summary

In reviewing the population trends of Van Buren County, the county has experienced moderate population growth throughout the past three decades, but has leveled off since the 2000 Census. In 1970, 56,173 people lived in Van Buren County and this number grew to a projected 77,235 by 2002 (see Table 6). Recent trends show that growth continues mostly in townships as opposed to villages and cities, placing pressure on existing agricultural activities due to this increasing need for residential land. It also puts additional strain on the municipalities to provide services to the shifting population.

Also, when compared with the state, the median age citizen of Van Buren County is slightly older than that of the rest of the state (39.8). In addition, racial and ethnic diversity is increasing in Van Buren County (see Table 6), increasing the need to promote cultural awareness and to celebrate the backgrounds and heritages of all races and cultures.

Overall, when analyzing the population characteristics further it can be concluded that a decreasing residential tax base and less State Revenue Sharing dollars, coupled with a skewed age pyramid will result in an increase of demand on local leaders to provide for government services with less.

Therefore, the demographic objectives desired by the Planning Commission are as follows:

- 1) Continue to provide necessary governmental services to an increasing and aging population.
- 2) Increase the promotion cultural awareness programs, celebrating the backgrounds and heritages of all racial and cultural groups throughout the county.
- 3) Promote county participation in collaborative efforts with local governments and service providers to develop, ensure and maintain comprehensive and consistent services for all groups of the population in Van Buren county

Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians

The importance of one particular demographic group to the history and makeup of Van Buren County is not well represented by any of the aforementioned tables and figures. That group is the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians.

At one time the territory of the Potawatomi Indians extended from Lake Erie to the site of present-day Chicago. The Potawatomi lived in villages united by clan and family ties, subsisted by hunting, fishing, gathering, and agriculture, and they traveled extensively throughout the Great Lakes by foot and canoe. The Potawatomi were linguistically, culturally, and politically allied with the Odawa and Ojibwa to the north.

Potawatomi territory was gradually relinquished through a series of treaties with the United States. This culminated in the 1833 Treaty of Chicago, which led to the removal of the majority of the Potawatomi to Iowa and Kansas. However, the villages along the St. Joseph and Paw Paw River Valleys, resisted the push to sign the Treaty. These villages, who had largely converted to Catholicism, united behind the leadership of Leopold Pokagon and were able to negotiate the right to remain in Michigan.

The Pokagon Band, as these allied villages came to be known, were not able to secure a reserved land base under the Treaty, but Leopold Pokagon, was given money, and by 1837, he had purchased 1,000 acres of land in Cass County's Silver Creek Township, a traditional hunting area.

At the new settlement, families were allowed to establish individual homesteads. A portion of land was given to the Catholic Church, upon which the Sacred Heart of Mary Church now stands. The land was never owned by the Band as a whole, however, and the property was gradually divided and broken apart.

The families along the Paw Paw River followed a similar strategy after the Treaty of Chicago, purchasing individual homesteads in the area, and a Catholic church and cemetery was established for the Potawatomi at Rush Lake, north of Hartford in Van Buren County. The Paw Paw River villages and Pokagon's village had always remained in close contact, and after Leopold Pokagon's death, many of the Silver Creek families relocated to Van Buren County.

Simon Pokagon, Leopold's son, rose to prominence during the late 1800s. Born in 1830 near Sumnerville, Simon was educated at Notre Dame and Oberlin.

After earning an education, Pokagon returned to the tribe, living at the Rush Lake community. He authored numerous booklets and articles, and he spent his life trying to improve Indian relations with Caucasians and make their integration as easy as possible. He made a famous speech at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, offering a counter position to the Exposition's theme celebrating the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's voyages.

Simon Pokagon died at his home near Hartford, Michigan, on January 28, 1899. He is buried in the Rush Lake Cemetery.

Although the Pokagon Band was recognized as a tribal entity with the right to remain in Michigan under the 1833 Treaty of Chicago, the Band endured a long battle to have the United States acknowledge their sovereign status. The Band pursued several lawsuits to obtain their treaty rights and land claims through the 1800s and 1900s, and was refused tribal status under the Indian Reorganization Act (1934). Their long struggle to gain federal recognition finally succeeded in September of 1994, and the Pokagon Restoration Act was signed into law by President Clinton. With offices located in Dowagiac, Michigan, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians distributes services to its 3000 citizens, and has recently adopted a new Tribal Constitution. The tribe has a ten county service area mandated by its Restoration Act, four of which are located in Southwestern Michigan and six are in Northwestern Indiana. The Band is in the process of reestablishing a land base, to include property in Dowagiac and New Buffalo, Michigan, North Liberty Indiana, as well as in Hartford, Michigan.

As a federally recognized tribe, the Pokagon Band were able to develop and open in 2007 the Four Winds Casino Resort on their land near New Buffalo, Michigan, in accordance with the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act and a compact with Michigan. It expanded in 2011 due to its success. The *Chicago Tribune* reported that if the casino were on the Las Vegas Strip, it would be the second largest there.

Architecturally the casino's rotunda is built in the style of the Potawatomi people's traditional lodges. A second, satellite casino, Four Winds Hartford, opened on August 30, 2011.^[5] The band has been limited to three casinos by its 2008 compact with the state. It will open its final casino, *Four Winds Dowagiac*, in 2013.

The tribe has also built some needed housing. Its newest project will be a community center. In a competition for federal stimulus funds, the Pokagon were granted \$2 million from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to build a planned community center at their tribal center in Dowagiac. The 8500-square foot building has been designed to satisfy Silver LEED standards, and incorporates a number of innovations to reduce its energy use and create a sustainable building: including a green roof, thick concrete flooring to act as a heat sink, windows to the south to gain winter sun and heat, and geothermal systems.

The tribe announced plans in 2012 to build a 164-acre "tribal village" in South Bend, Indiana, including housing, healthcare, and government facilities, and a casino and hotel.

Only a decreasing number of elders among the Potawatomi bands speak the language, but the Pokagon are participating in a program to restore teaching and use of the language.

The administration offices of The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians are located at:

58620 Sink Road
Dowagiac, Michigan 49047

For more information call the office of the Tribal Chairman at (269) 782-6323 or 1-888-376-9988. The Pokagon Band also has a website at:
<http://www.pokagon.com/>.

Chapter 2-Land Use

Land use planning is essential for long-range sustainable growth and its utilization promotes the health, safety and welfare of a community.

Proper land use will be a debated subject for Van Buren County in the years to come. As population increases and the eastern portion of Van Buren County continues to be developed as a "bedroom community" to Kalamazoo, it will be essential for coordinated planning and other "smart growth" tenets (to be discussed in Chapter 7) to be implemented on a countywide basis. The lack of planning results in haphazard growth, which leads to problems such as loss of productive farmland, urban core degradation and increased infrastructure costs. Communities have the responsibility to create an environment with pleasant living conditions now and in the future, including a sustainable balance of agriculture, commerce and industry and environmentally sensitive areas.

The most recent completed Current Land Use map for Van Buren County dates back to 1978 and does not provide an accurate representation of land use in Van Buren County today. Until an accurate, updated Land Use map is complete a tax classification map is used here to identify current county land uses. Map 3 identifies the current tax classification for each parcel of land in Van Buren County.

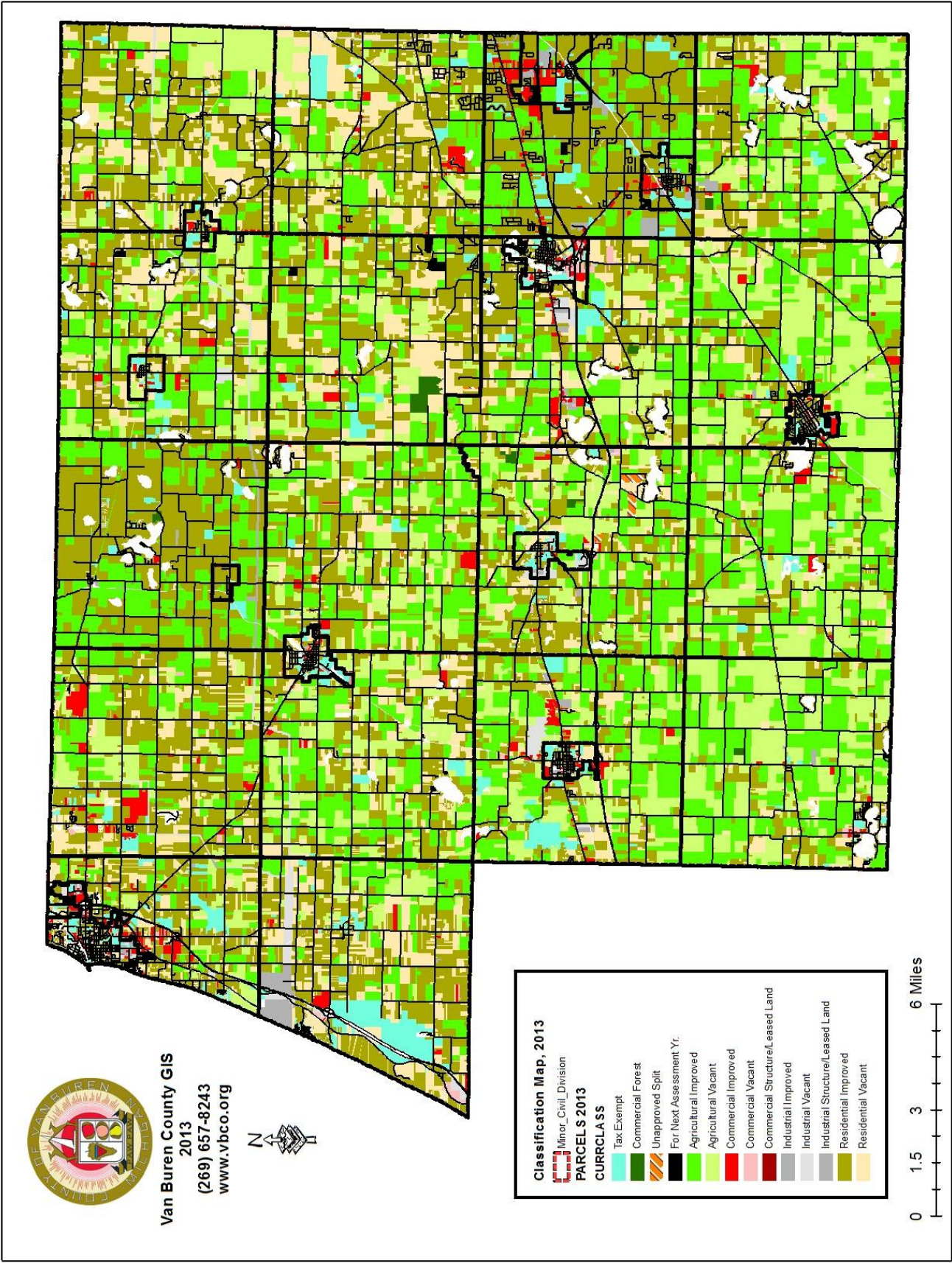
A comprehensive view of current land use in the county would include plat maps, current zoning maps, and future land use maps from each local government. Much of this is available as are aerial photos taken in 2003, 2007, & 2011 at www.vbco.org. The reference to the internet site is important to ensure that the reader that this document refers to the most up to date information on current and future land use plans.

An overview of the natural resource base of land in Van Buren County follows. This is helpful in understanding the trends of development in the county over time. Since all land use decisions are made at the local level, that is the level at which Natural resources can be protected in Van Buren County. Information in this chapter can be supplemented by www.vbco.org.

Future Land Use Map

As previously mentioned, the role of the Van Buren County Planning Commission is limited to an advisory group, which promotes sustainable development countywide. Because of this limited authority, the commission will not provide a future land use map in this version of the comprehensive plan. The commission emphasizes respect of local control over land use issues and hopes that local planning bodies will plan in accordance with countywide goals and existing local data. Each municipality with a master plan will have a future land use map, and a countywide future land use map may be added to the County Comprehensive Plan, in the future.

Map 3

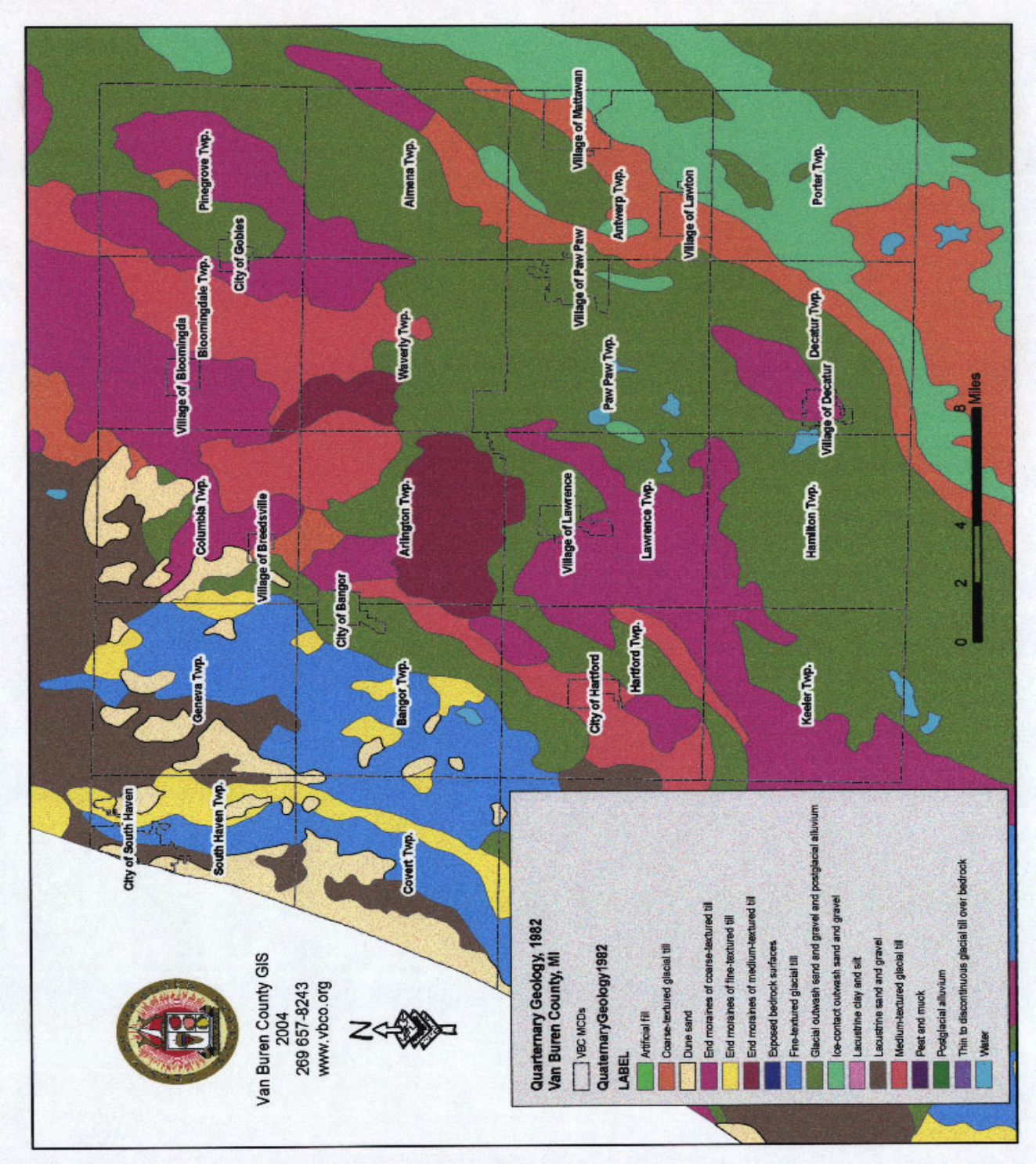


Geology

Southwest Michigan is located on the southwestern flank of the Michigan Basin (see Map 4). A bedrock feature centered on Gratiot County, this structural depression resembles a gigantic set of nested bowls. Everywhere in southwest Michigan bedrock units slope gently to the center of the Basin.

The oldest bedrock units underlie the glacial deposits in Berrien and Cass Counties, and the rocks immediately underlying the glacial sediments are progressively younger towards the center of the basin. Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, Branch and most of Van Buren, Ottawa, Muskegon, Kalamazoo and Calhoun Counties are underlain by shale. Eaton, Ionia, most of Kent and portions of Kalamazoo, Calhoun, Barry, Muskegon and Ottawa counties are underlain by sandstone or sandstone and shale.

Map 4

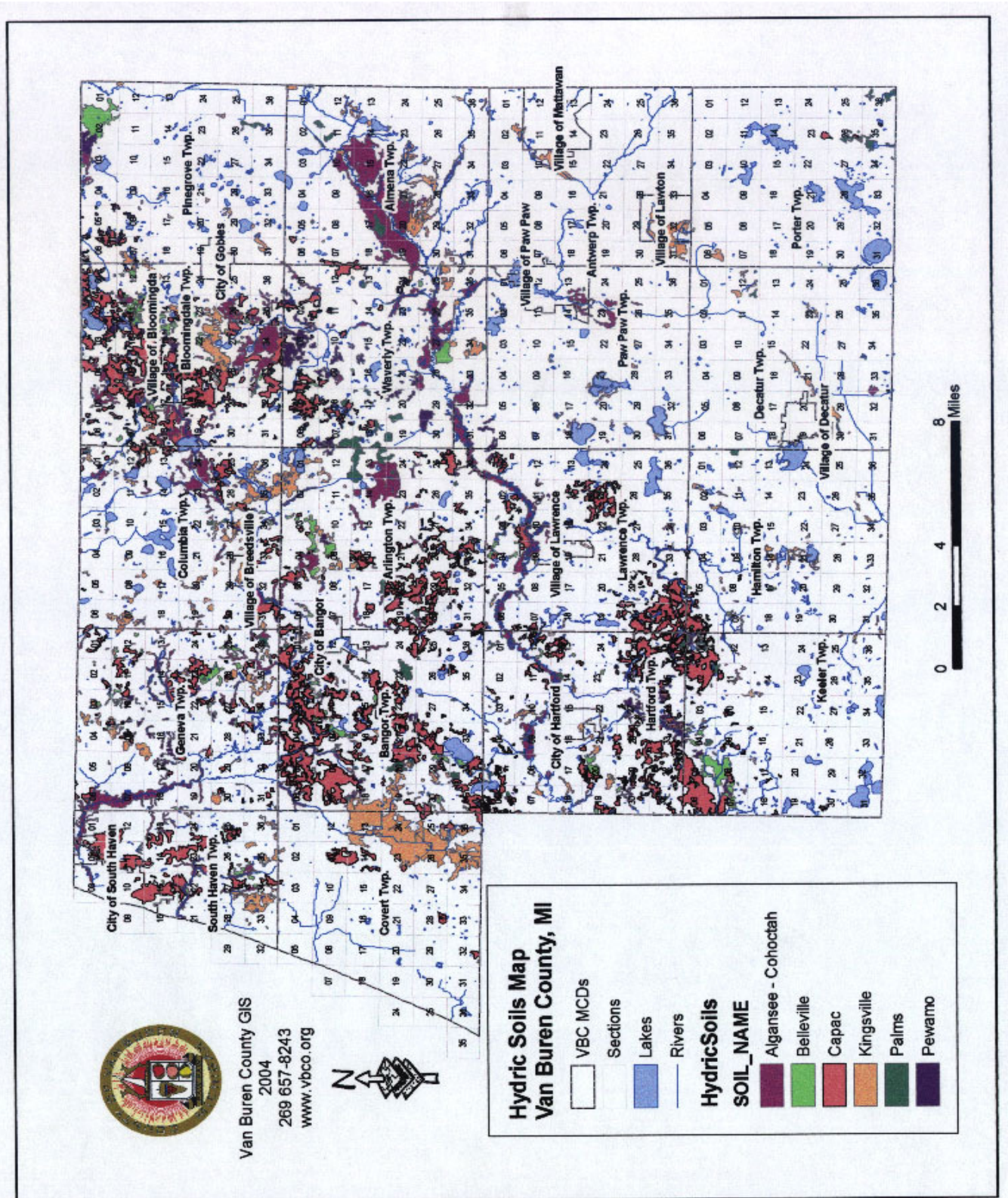


Soils

The soil characteristics of Van Buren County reflect the strong glacial influence, which left behind both healthy and un-healthy, well-drained and poorly draining soils. However, the county has an abundance of soils well suited for agricultural production. The soil composition of Van Buren County can be seen in Map 5.

The last soil survey in Van Buren County MI was published in 1986. The United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service publishes surveys describing the soils characteristics in counties nationwide. For more information visit <http://soils.usda.gov/survey/>.

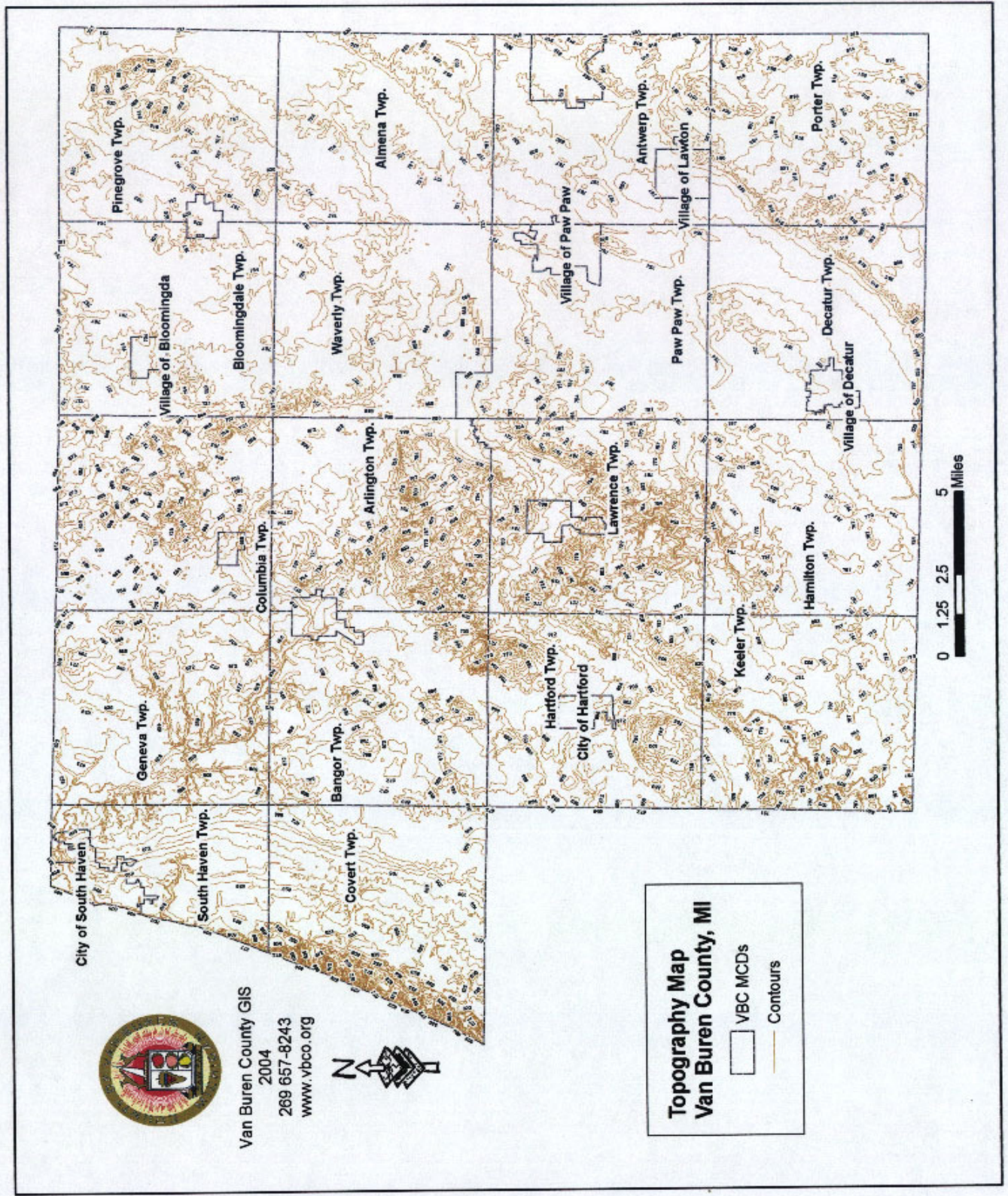
Map 5



Topography

Topography in Van Buren ranges from knobby ridges and basin like depressions in the terminal moraine areas to gentle slopes and flat bottomland on the outwash and river flood plains. The hills of the Kalamazoo moraine rise 160 to 190 feet about the till plain and Paw Paw Lake. The internal relief on the moraine is 50 to 75 feet. The basins are 25 feet or more below the outwash level. The hills of the Valparaiso moraine rise as much as 150 feet above the surrounding areas. Relief on this moraine varies considerably across the county. The Lake Border moraine has little relief. The highest elevation in the county is about 1,060 feet above sea level in Antwerp Township, section 35. Map 6 is a topographical map of the county.

Map 6



Hydrologic System

The Van Buren County Hydrologic System contains multiple major watersheds. A watershed is a geographic area in which water, sediments, and dissolved materials drain from higher elevations to a common low-lying outlet or basin at a point on a larger stream, lake, underlying aquifer, or estuary. Map 7 displays the hydrologic systems and watershed boundaries within Van Buren County.

Most of Van Buren County is contained within three major watersheds: the Paw Paw River, which drains almost two-thirds of the county; the Dowagiac River, flowing southwesterly into Cass County; and the Black River, which drains the northwestern portion of the county near the City of South Haven. In addition, the Paw Paw River and the Dowagiac River Watersheds are part of the larger St. Joseph River Watershed.

Surface water features - lakes, streams, rivers, and ponds - are directly affected by land development. Soil erosion, impermeable surfaces (such as parking lots and roofs), soil contamination, and recreational activities can each affect surface water quality.

Watershed degradation can occur through various sources. Non-point source pollution poses one of the greatest threats to surface water. Rather than occurring from one major source, like a sewage treatment plant or industrial use, non-point source pollution results from rainfall or snowmelt moving over and through the ground. As this runoff moves, it picks up and carries away natural and human-made pollutants. These are deposited into lakes, rivers, wetlands, ponds, and groundwater.

Watershed education and watershed management planning are essential tools utilized to protect water quality today and in the future. Such plans seek to identify water quality concerns and solutions throughout the watershed. Below is a list of current area watersheds with management plans. For further description of Van Buren County watersheds and for more information on current watershed management and protection initiatives in Van Buren County visit links below.

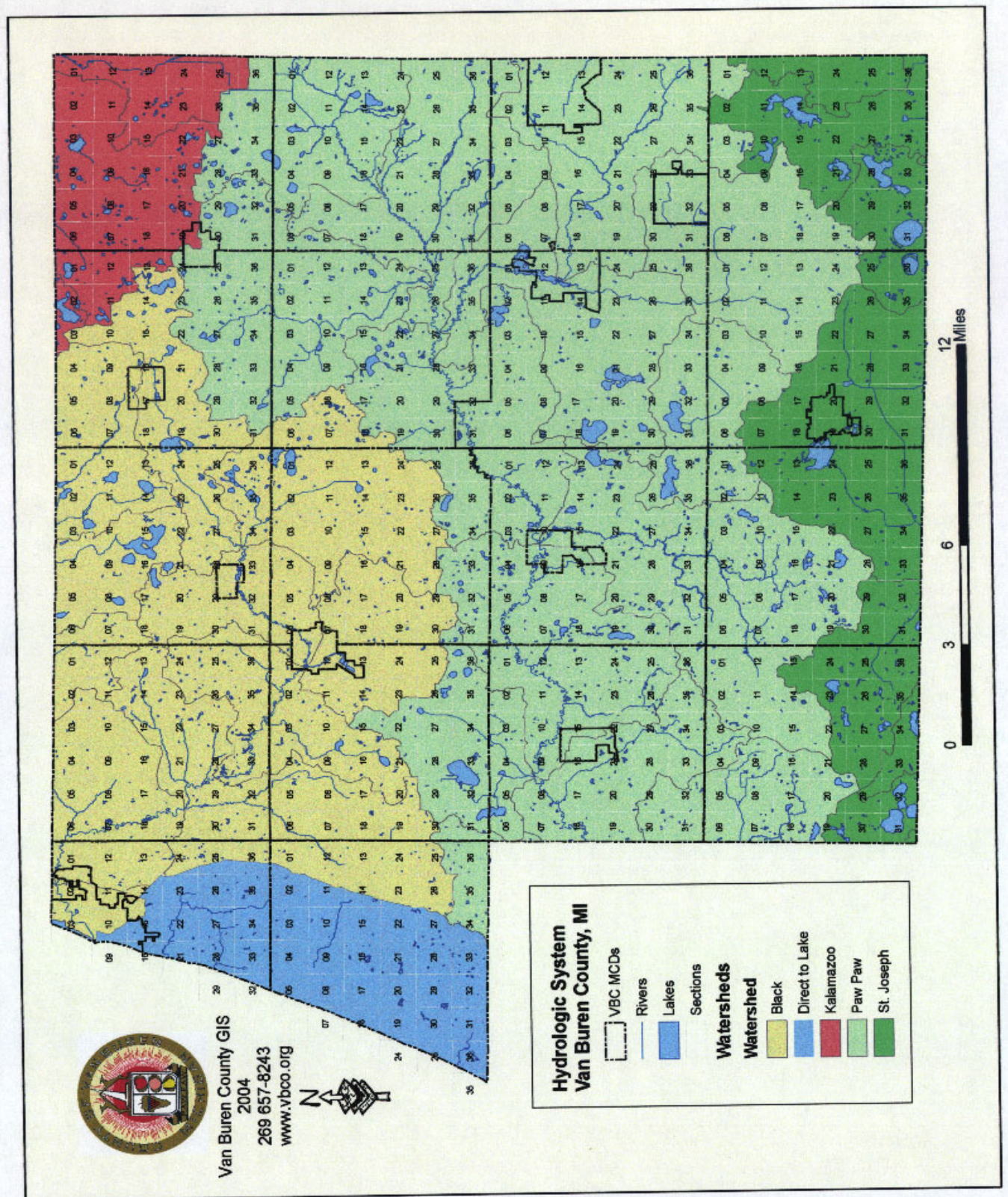
Watershed Management Plans

For information regarding the Black River, Dowagiac River, Galien River, Kalamazoo River, Lower St. Joseph/ Galien River, Paw Paw River, Rocky River, St. Joseph River Watershed Plans

Van Buren Conservation District <http://vanburencd.org/>

South West Michigan Planning Commission <http://www.swmpc.org/projects.asp>

Map 7



Wetlands

Wetlands are areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and fens (EPA Definition).

Prairie fens are found in the former oak-savanna prairie region of southwest MI. They are very rich in calcium and magnesium. Typical plants found in prairie fens are switch grass, Indian grass, big bluestem, sedges, rushes, Indian plantain, and prairie drop seed. The wettest part of a prairie fen, which is usually found near the water source, is called a "sedge flat" because members of the sedge family dominate the vegetation. The "fen meadow" is the largest part and is more diverse with many lowland prairie grasses and wildflowers. Slightly elevated areas, especially around the upland edge, also support tamarack, dogwood, bog birch, and poison sumac. Map 8 displays the Wetland Classifications in Van Buren County.

Wetlands provide groundwater recharge, pollution control, wildlife habitat and other important functions, and together with other natural features, they contribute to our sense of rural character.

Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems in the world. Not only do they provide great volumes of food that attract many animal species, but they also play an important role in atmospheric maintenance. Wetlands store carbon within their plant communities and soil instead of releasing it to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide, which helps to moderate global climate conditions.

In addition, wetlands perform functions that include natural water quality improvement, flood protection, shoreline erosion control, opportunities for recreation and aesthetic appreciation, and natural products for use at no cost.

Wetlands serve as a filter by intercepting surface-water runoff from higher dry land before the runoff reaches open water. As the runoff water passes through, wetlands retain excess nutrients and some pollutants, and reduce sediment that would clog waterways and affect fish and amphibian egg development. In addition to improving water quality through filtering, some wetlands maintain stream flow during dry periods and replenish groundwater, on which many Americans depend groundwater for drinking.

Wetlands also offer flood protection by serving as natural sponges that trap and slowly release surface water, rain, snowmelt, groundwater, and floodwaters. This combined water storage and braking action lowers flood heights and reduces erosion. Wetlands within and downstream of urban areas are particularly valuable, as they work to counteract the greatly increased rate and volume of surface-water runoff from pavement and buildings. Preserving and restoring wetlands can help to provide the level of flood control otherwise provided by expensive dredge operations and levees.

In addition, according to the EPA, more than one-third of the United States' threatened and endangered species live only in wetlands, and nearly half use wetlands at some point in their lives. Many other animals and plants depend on wetlands for survival. In fact, an international agreement was developed to protect wetlands of international importance because some species of migratory birds are completely dependent on certain wetlands and would become extinct if those wetlands were destroyed.

Additional information on the benefits and importance of wetlands can be obtained from: <http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/vital/nature.html>.

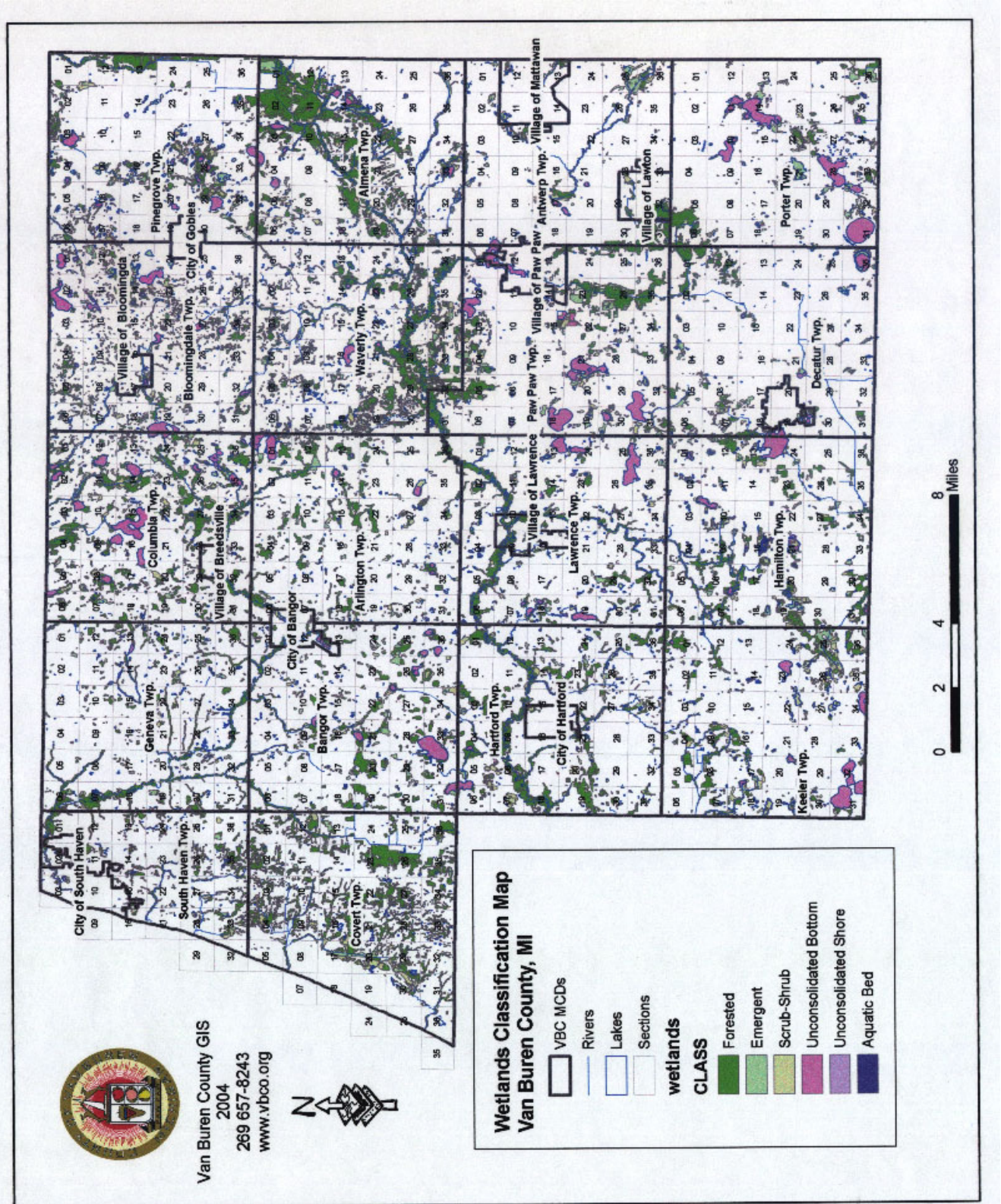
At the present time, the EPA estimates that the lower 48 states contained an estimated 105.5 million acres of wetlands in 1997, compared to over 220 million acres present in the 1600's. The years from the mid-1950s to the mid- 1970s were a time of major wetland loss, and 22 states, including Michigan, lost over 50% of their wetlands before conservation efforts began in the 1980's.

Between 1986 and 1997, an estimated 58,500 acres of wetlands were lost each year in the contiguous United States. These losses, as well as degradation, have greatly diminished our nation's wetlands resources; as a result, we no longer have the benefits they provided. The increase in flood damages, drought damages, and the declining bird populations are, in part, the result of wetlands degradation and destruction.

However, loss rates have declined due, in part, to implementation and enforcement of wetland protection measures, as well as the elimination of some incentives for wetland drainage. Public education and outreach about the value and functions of wetlands, private land initiatives, coastal monitoring and protection programs, and wetland restoration and creation actions have also helped reduce overall wetland losses.

For more information on the Wetland Areas of Van Buren County visit the Van Buren County webpage at www.vbco.org.

Map 8



Water Bodies

The water resources of Van Buren County include productive groundwater reservoirs, a network of streams, rivers and many inland lakes. Van Buren County has over 300 lakes and ponds ranging in size from less than .1 acre to up to 300 acres. In addition to this abundance of inland water, Van Buren County also possesses 13 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. Map 9 displays the water bodies in Van Buren County.

The water bodies in the county contribute greatly to the economic development opportunities in the county and have become a great attraction for residential development. In addition, Van Buren water bodies are an important source of recreation and tourism, where residents and tourists can relax on sandy beaches, fish, boat, and practice other water sports like skiing and tubing.

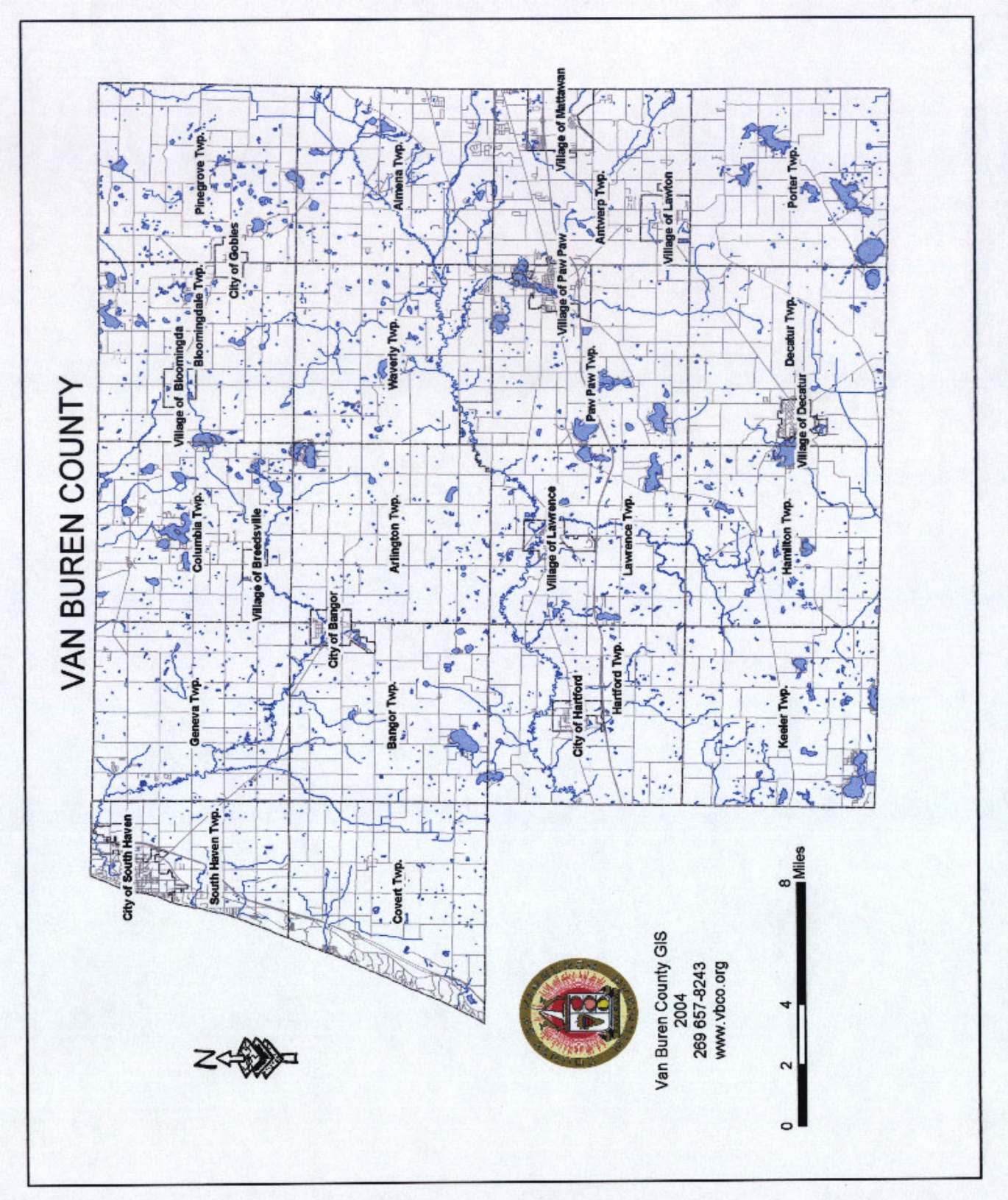
Water resources are not tied to jurisdictional boundaries. This plan supports the multi-jurisdictional watershed planning efforts that have occurred and are occurring across the county and southwest Michigan. All local land use decisions impact water quality and it is important for local government to recognize the watershed area they are apart of and develop future land use maps in coordination with watershed plans if they have been developed.

Flood Prone Areas

Most Flood Prone communities in the United States participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The NFIP provides local communities insurance coverage after the community has completed a certain flood hazard mitigation program. The NFIP is administered through FEMA.

For information visit <http://www.fema.gov>

Map 9



Agricultural Lands, Open Space, and Farmland Preservation

Purchase of Development Rights

Governor Granholm and the Legislature enacted Michigan Public Act 262 of 2000, which created an agricultural preservation fund within the State Treasury to provide grants to local units of government to assist in the acquisition of farmland conservation easements, provided that the local unit has adopted an ordinance for the purchase of development rights and that the local unit has an updated comprehensive land use plan that includes a plan for farmland preservation.

In Van Buren County, the County Board of Commissioners (BOC) determined that farmland and open space preservation is an important initiative in order to preserve productive agricultural lands, the local economy, rural character, and the rich abundance of natural resources that make the county such a desirable place to live, work, and visit. The dominant land use within Van Buren County is farmland currently in active agricultural production, and the climate, variety of soils, and terrain make the county well suited to the production of a great number of row crops and specialty crops, such as fruit and grapes and livestock, including many foods available for direct human consumption.

The county agricultural industry provides the opportunity to harvest locally grown foods to sell at roadside stands, farmers' markets, local retail food stores and other local outlets in the area, and provides employment opportunities for residents offered by agricultural producers, agricultural product processors, agricultural equipment suppliers, farm service suppliers, and retail sellers of products manufactured within the county. Agriculture in Van Buren County also significantly contributes to the local economy in direct sales of agricultural products at the farm gate. The preservation of prime agricultural lands within the county will ensure the economic vitality of the county's agricultural production industry for decades to come.

The county recognizes that land suitable for farming is an irreplaceable natural resource with soil and topographic characteristics that have been enhanced by generations of agricultural use, and when such land is converted to residential or other uses, a critical county resource is permanently lost to the current and future citizens of Van Buren County and the State of Michigan. Because the availability of farmland and open space, including wetlands, woods, agricultural fields and wildlife habitat areas, stimulates both the human spirit and the local economy, and because the preservation efforts of local units of government through local comprehensive planning, zoning, subdivision and land division regulations have not been totally effective in providing long-term protection of farmland and open space, on July 13, 2004, the Van Buren County BOC adopted the Van Buren County Farmland and Open Space Preservation Ordinance, establishing a formal countywide program to protect and preserve farmland and open space within Van Buren County.

The Van Buren County Farmland and Open Space Preservation program will preserve farmland pursuant P.A. 183 of 1943, as amended, MCLA, 125.231 through 125.240. The Van Buren County BOC is authorized to acquire the development rights from farmland throughout Van Buren County by purchase,

gift, grant, bequest, devise, covenant, or contract but only at a price which is equal to or less than the fair market value of the development rights as determined by valuation methods approved in this ordinance.

The County shall only purchase development rights for farmlands that meet the definition of eligible farmland or other eligible land as set forth in the ordinance, are located within the jurisdiction of a participating local unit of government, are voluntarily offered for sale by an owner of farmland or other eligible land, have been determined to be consistent with the farmland and open space elements of the comprehensive plan of the participating local government and the Van Buren County Comprehensive Plan, and have applications that have been reviewed and approved by the land preservation board (LPB) and legislative body of the participating local government.

The primary purpose of the County ordinance is to allow local units of government to apply for funds for the purchase of farmland. However, funding may also come directly from local government, the county, or other private or not-for-profit entities to purchase lands through the county program. Further, although the emphasis seems to be placed on the purchase of productive farmland, if the interest arises to purchase open spaces as a goal to protect natural resources or recreational areas, the ordinance also allows for that.

The permanent acquisition by Van Buren County, the State of Michigan, the United States, or other qualified conservancy organizations of voluntarily offered interest in farmland and open space lands within Van Buren County, as provided in this ordinance and as authorized by the Constitution and Statutes of the State of Michigan, will permit these lands to remain in farmland and open space and provide long-term protection for the public interests that are served by farmland and open space lands in Van Buren County.

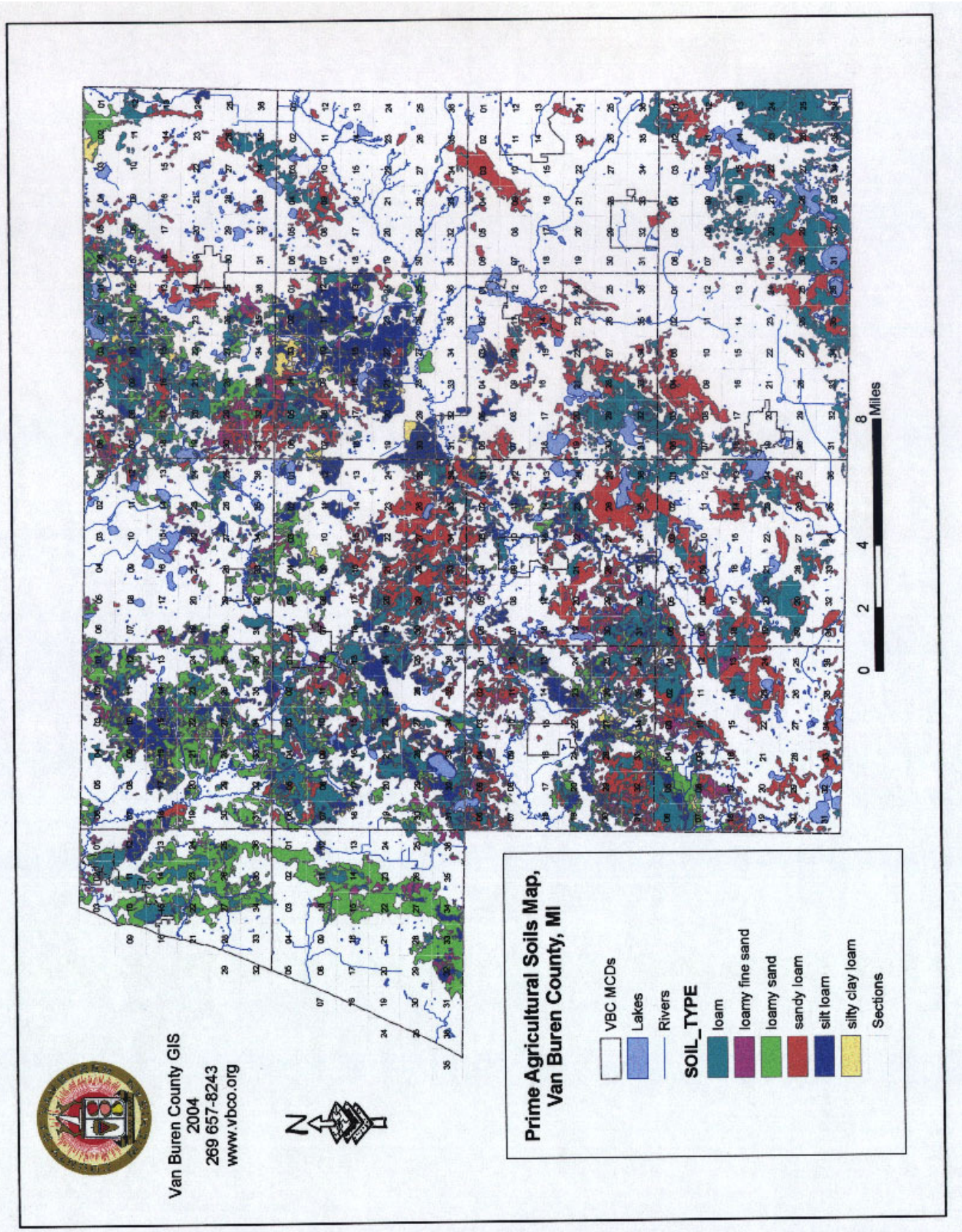
The establishment of a farmland and open space preservation program will provide specific public benefits to Van Buren County, including lessening congestion on certain streets, roads, and highways; prohibiting the over crowding of land; lessening the concentration of population in selected locations, lessening scattered urban sprawl development which will lead to increased efficiencies in the provision of governmental services; retention of the historic rural character of the county necessary for the continuation of the county tourism industry; retention of large blocks of farmland suitable for economic agricultural production purposes; retention of large blocks of open space including woodlands, wetlands, and wildlife habitat to protect the natural environment of the county, and to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the county.

The establishment of a farmland and open space preservation program including any cost necessary incident to such acquisition, and the monitoring and enforcement of development right conservation easements, or the participation with the state, qualified land conservancy or any other party for such purposes will promote the public health, welfare, safety and general welfare of the people of Van Buren County.

The complete ordinance can be found in the Appendix, together with the farmland preservation plans and resolutions authorizing participation in the program of all participating local units of government.

Map 11 displays the prime agricultural soils of Van Buren County.

Map 10



Other Methods of Preservation

In addition to the PDR program, Van Buren County supports the preservation efforts of local governments through tax relief and zoning techniques. Some of these techniques include the following:

Exclusive Use Zoning

Exclusive use zoning is most appropriate where there is limited pressure for residential development and there already exist large areas of prime or unique agricultural resources.

The purposes of an exclusive agricultural zone may include:

- protecting productive farms;
- avoiding conflicting land uses;
- maintaining a viable agricultural economic base; and
- maintaining open space/rural character.

New non-farm residences are often strictly regulated in the Exclusive Use District, including approvals only through a Special Land Use process. Site development standards within the District could include a maximum lot area for non-farm, residential use, and unless otherwise provided for, a large minimum lot area for a farm dwelling unit. Other provisions might include a maximum lot to depth ratio of 1:3 and large minimum lot widths and setbacks.

Sliding Scale Zoning

Sliding scale zoning limits the number of times that a parent parcel can be split, based on its size (i.e., the larger the parcel the more splits that may occur, up to a maximum number established). A larger minimum parcel size is also established.

Unlike exclusive use zoning, sliding scale zoning allows some non-farm residential development without special land use or other reviews. Sliding scale zoning can be useful in agricultural areas where there are significant development pressures and land speculation. The use of sliding scale zoning is most effective in areas where a wide range of parcel sizes exist and non-farm residential development has already begun to occur.

Minimum and maximum building lot sizes can be used to encourage the location of non-farm development on less productive farmland and/or in areas where development is more concentrated to direct growth onto already fragmented land. The use of buffer areas (see later discussion) is highly recommended to avoid land use conflicts between new residential development and agriculture fields.

Since this method does permit some use of land for non-agricultural uses, it allows communities to more effectively avoid a claim that land has been "taken" without compensation.

Quarter/Quarter Zoning

Quarter/quarter zoning is a density based zoning technique that is most appropriate in rural areas with large farming operations, moderate growth pressures, and where average parcel sizes generally exceed 40 acres.

"Quarter/quarter zoning" refers to a quarter of a quarter section of land (1/16 of 640 acres, or 40 acres) where a limited number of non-farm homes are allowed for every 40-acres of land.

The non-farm splits are usually regulated by minimum and maximum sizes (e.g., no less than 1 acre and not greater than 2 acres), and they are often required to be contiguous to one another to avoid breaking up farmland into smaller or odd-shaped sizes. A variation of this method is to establish a density of homes within each section of land. Once that density is reached, further residential or other development is prohibited.

Large Lot Zoning

Large lot zoning simply increases the lot size required in residential zone districts where farming operations exist, except perhaps, where public utilities are/can be provided. Lot sizes are generally greater than 10 acres, depending on the objective (farmland preservation vs. rural character). In areas where farmland preservation is particularly important to the community individual lot sizes of 40 to 160 acres may be applicable.

Large lot zoning, however, is generally not considered to be effective in farmland protection since low density development patterns create parcel sizes which are "too big to mow, but too little to plow." In areas of marginal farming production this technique can have a detrimental effect by requiring large lots for individual homes and taking large parcels out of production for that purpose. This technique may be effective in maintaining rural character, but not farmland.

Open Space (Cluster) Development

Another approach to farmland preservation is to concentrate less on restricting development of property and work instead on the efficient use of land. Open space development (or as it is sometimes known, cluster development) provides for a denser concentration of development in a limited area, with no increase in the overall, or "gross density" of the site.

The object of clustering is not to increase the number of units developed, but to regulate the amount of land disturbed by structures, lawns, and drives. The gross density must still fall into the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.

On larger parcels, the acreage not used in the development may be set aside for farming, provided that ownership or control of the area to be used for farming is firmly established. This development style permits areas of agricultural lands to remain in production, even as other parts of the property are developed for residential use.

Open space lands provided as part of an open space development could be incorporated in a long-term lease agreement with a local farmer. Farm operators may also take advantage of this option by developing only a portion of the property to gain additional financial resources, while retaining the remainder for agricultural purposes.

Even where open space development may have a limited impact on the preservation of farmland, it can allow for the preservation of many site features, such as wooded areas, steep slopes, wetlands, and other natural amenities.

Agricultural Buffers

Balancing the need to continue agricultural practices and the desire to develop land for non-agricultural purposes can be challenging. Open space buffers between active agricultural areas and other uses, such as residential development, can help reduce land use conflicts, particularly where residential and agricultural conflicts are occurring with greater frequency. The use of buffers can aid in easing land use conflicts and improving the relationship of agricultural uses and new residents.

Buffers are generally included in residential developments, rather than on farming operations, principally because the farm was probably the first use in place. Buffers should be sufficiently wide to protect the farming operation from lawn fertilizers, playing children, and other conflicts. At the same time, they cannot be so burdensome as to require excessive land commitments from residential property owners.

Buffers are most effective if a "no-disturb" zone is provided between residential properties and farmland. This requirement should be tied to subdivision, site condominium, planned unit development, or land division approval. It should also be required that the buffer be described in the property deed to alert potential buyers of the need to honor the no-disturb area.

Transfer of Development Rights

Transfer of development rights (TDR) offers a land preservation option that is quite similar to PDR. However, instead of simply being sold, the development rights are transferred from one area and given to another. Therefore, a conservation easement is placed on one parcel (typically agricultural), the sending area, and an increase in development density is allowed in another area, the receiving area. The costs of purchasing the easements are then recovered from the developers who build in the receiving area.

These sending and receiving areas are predetermined, and are therefore the main difference between TDR and PDR programs. This requires a more detailed comprehensive plan, with greater certainty about where development will occur and where it will not.

As in PDR, the owner of the preserved site retains existing use rights while receiving compensation for the development value of the land, thereby restricting

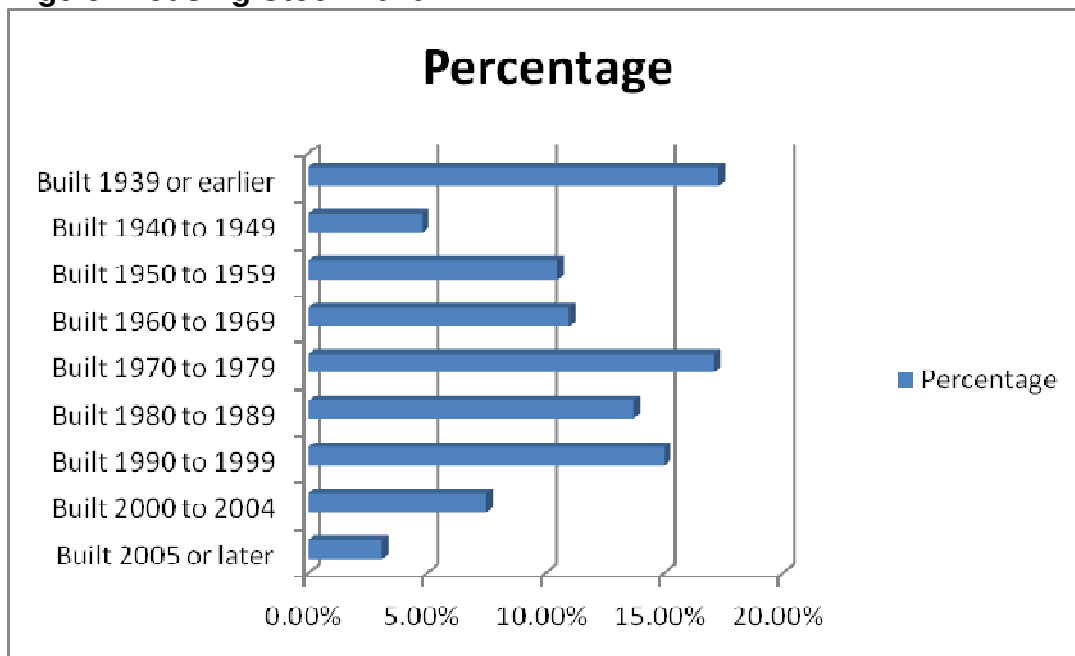
development on this property. The down zoning of the sending area does not necessarily reduce the economic value of the property within that area, because the development rights can remain in the landowners' hands and can be used on other properties of the owner or sold to others for use elsewhere.

According to Timothy J. Lawrence from the Ohio State University (<http://ohioline.osu.edu/cd-fact/1264.html>), TDRs have been successful in many areas of the country for the preservation or protection of open space, natural resources, farmland, and urban areas of historical importance. More than 20 states have enacted or amended statutes to accommodate TDR.

Chapter 3 – Housing

A strong economy coupled with falling interest rates created a favorable situation for new housing to be built within Van Buren County from the later part of the 1990's through the the beginning of the past decade. The latter portion of the past decade however included a collapse of the financial system causing rampant foreclosures. This significantly impacted Van Buren County and can be seen in much of the data. (Figure 5). Between 2000 and 2010 there were nearly 3000 new housing units, however, data from the 2000 2010 Census indicates that the current housing stock remains quite old.

Figure 3
Age of Housing Stock 2010



Source US Census 2010

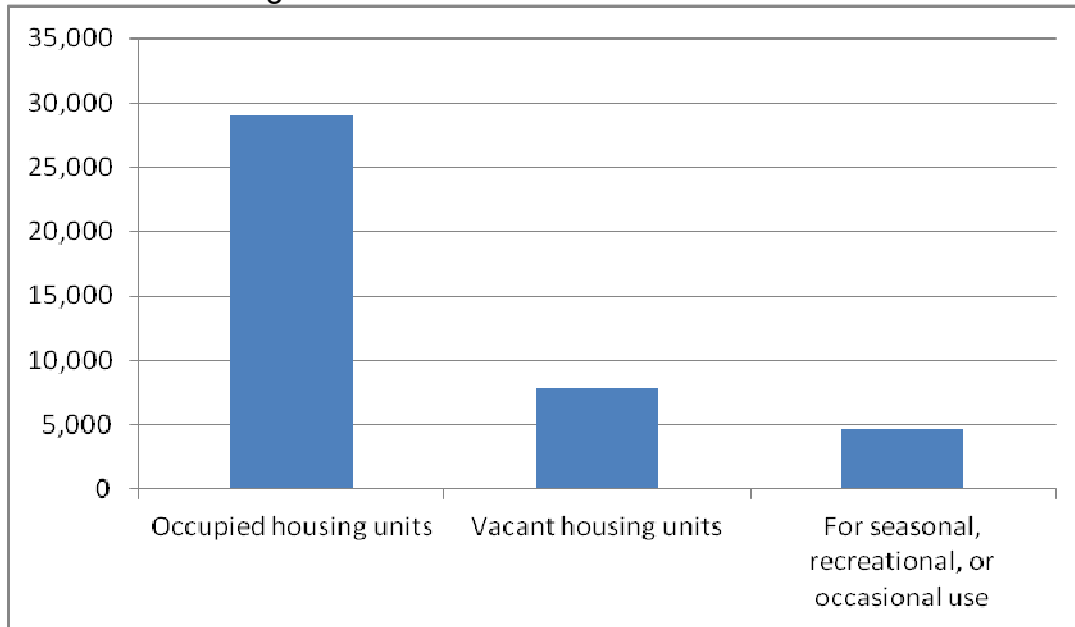
Table 6

HOUSING OCCUPANCY	2000	2010	% Change
Total housing units	33,975	36,785	8.27%
Occupied housing units	27,982	28,928	3.38%
Vacant housing units	5,993	7,857	31.10%
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	3,857	4,685	21.47%
Homeowner vacancy rate (percent) [8]	2.1	3	42.86%
Rental vacancy rate (percent) [9]	8	11.7	46.25%
HOUSING TENURE	2000	2010	% Change
Occupied housing units	27,982	28,928	3.38%
Owner-occupied housing units	22,266	22,533	1.20%
Average household size of owner-occupied units	2.71	2.64	-2.58%
Renter-occupied housing units	5,716	6,395	11.88%
Average household size of renter-occupied units	2.46	2.48	0.81%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010

In accordance with the 2010 Census, there are 36,785 housing units in Van Buren County, of which 28,928 are occupied. The breakdown of housing occupation is contained in Figure 6.

Figure 4
Van Buren Housing Stock 2010

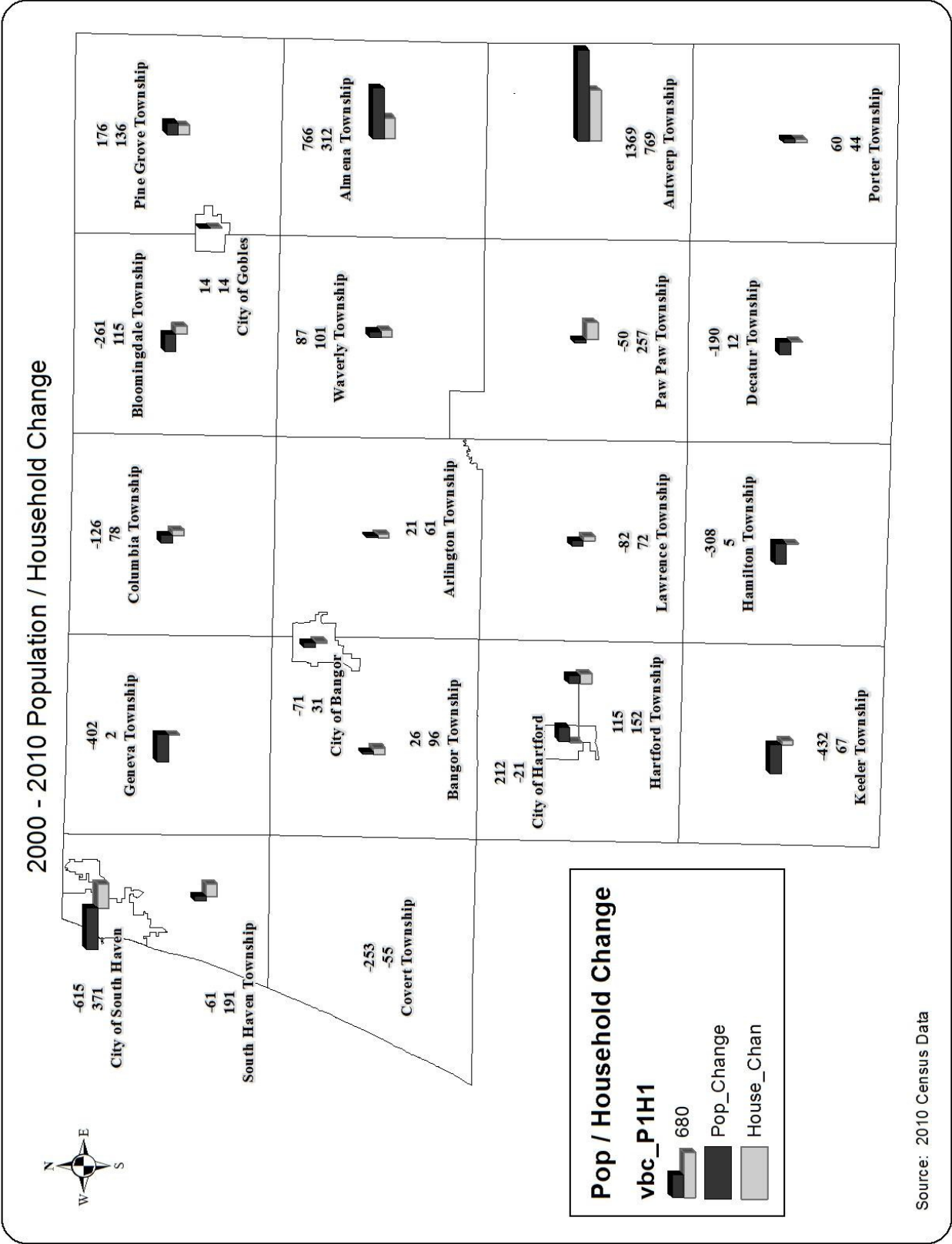


Source: U.S. Census 2010

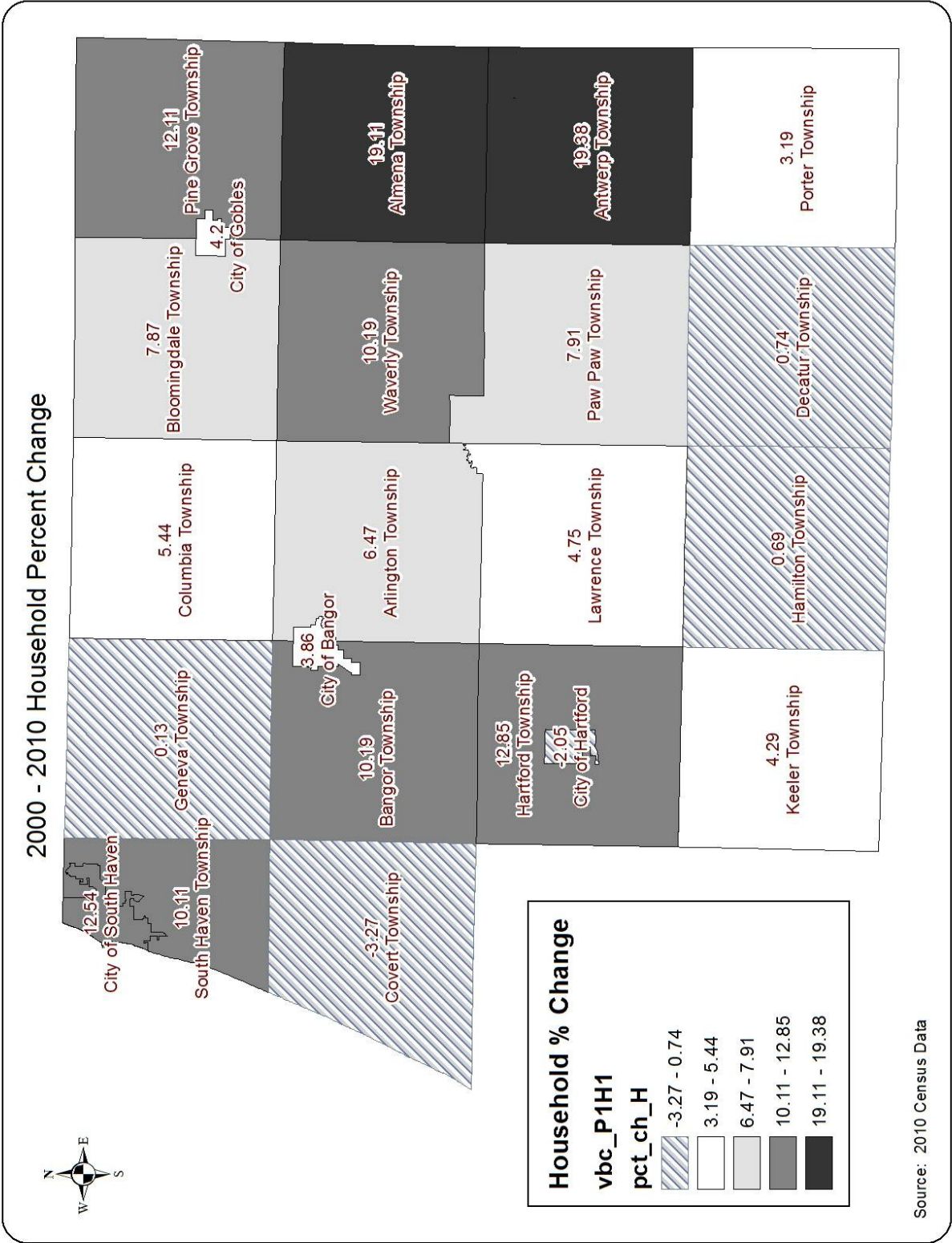
The statistics reveal that 21% of the housing in Van Buren County is vacant is actually misleading because vacant housing can be defined in many different ways. The vacant housing count in Van Buren County totals nearly 8,000, many of these are deemed as seasonal use and additionally many homes are currently for sale or lease, but it cannot be ignored that the impact of the housing bust caused a 31% increase to the number of vacant housing units countywide.

Despite the predominant aging housing stock, the past decade has witnessed an 8.27% increase (2810) of housing units in Van Buren County. The change in housing occurred differently depending on location. On the east side of the county, urban sprawl from Kalamazoo, mixed with low interest rates and a strong stock market caused growth in both population and housing. Other areas of the county actually saw significant declines in housing units. Even more perplexing were the South Haven and Keeler Twp. areas which showed increased housing units paired with a decline in population. These may help to explain the 46.25% increase of rental vacancies from 2000-2010.

Map 11



Map 12



The number of households has also continued to increase throughout the past few decades: Maps 12 & 13 show where the changes have occurred and by what percentage change. Table 10 also shows the breakdown of Household type.

Primarily, the county consists of family households, and the majority who own their own homes tend to be married, however from 2000-2010 there was a 16.4% decrease in families with children 18 and under. There also was a 32% increase in female householders, and a 24% increase in households with one or more persons aged 60 or over.

Table 7

Households by Family Type 2010					
HOUSEHOLD TYPE	Units	%	HOUSEHOLD TYPE	Units	%
Owner-occupied housing units	28,928	100	Renter-occupied housing units	6395	100
Family households	16,863	74.8	Family households	3,571	55.8
Householder 15 to 64 years	13,198	58.6	Householder 15 to 64 years	3,298	51.6
Householder 65 years and over	3,665	16.3	Householder 65 years and over	273	4.3
Married-couple family	13,669	60.7	Married-couple family	1673	26.2
Male householder, no wife present	1,092	4.8	Male householder, no wife present	500	7.8
Female householder, no husband present	2,102	9.6	Female householder, no husband present	1,398	21.9
Nonfamily households	5,670	25.2	Nonfamily households	2,824	44.2
Householder 15 to 64 years	3,511	15.6	Householder 15 to 64 years	2,035	31.8
Householder 65 years and over	2,159	9.6	Householder 65 years and over	789	12.3
Male householder	2,811	12.5	Male householder	1,370	21.4
Living alone	2,226	9.9	Living alone	1,064	16.6
65 years and over	667	3.0	65 years and over	196	3.1
Not living alone	585	2.6	Not living alone	306	4.8
Female householder	2,859	12.7	Female householder	1,454	22.7
Living alone	2,433	10.8	Living alone	1,232	19.3
65 years and over	1328	5.9	65 years and over	556	8.7
Not living alone	426	1.9	Not living alone	222	3.5

The median housing value and median household income are both important tools that help to analyze development within the county. - Overall, the county median household income is \$44,435, while the median value of a home in the county is \$122,300. In order to determine the extent to which housing is affordable, the affordable unit price statistic is calculated by multiplying the household median income by 2.5. Based on the overall county median household income, an affordable home costs \$111,087.50 or less. Therefore, a home valued at the median home value, \$111,087.50, is considered affordable. However, because the median home value indicates the middle value of homes in the county, we know that over half of the homes are valued at greater than \$111,087.50, and many of these will be valued over \$122,300. With an aging population and over 15% of the population below the poverty level, the need for more affordable housing in Van Buren County is substantiated

Table 8

Value of Housing Units 2010	Number	Percentage
Owner-occupied units	22,849	22,849
Less than \$50,000	2,744	12.00%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	5,892	25.80%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	5,463	23.90%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	3,728	16.30%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	2,804	12.30%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	1,516	6.60%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	574	2.50%
\$1,000,000 or more	128	0.60%
Median (dollars)	122,300	(X)

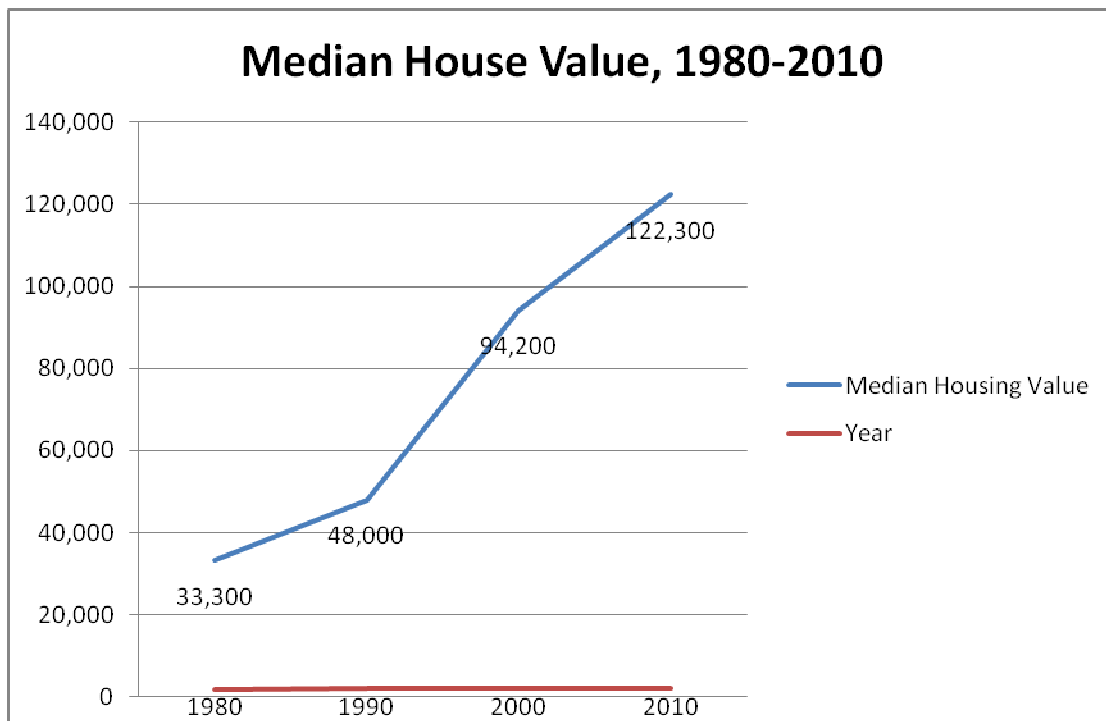
Source: U.S Census 2010

Table 9

INCOME AND BENEFITS (IN 2011 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS)		
Total households	28,846	28,846
Less than \$10,000	2,555	8.90%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	1,786	6.20%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	3,657	12.70%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	3,611	12.50%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	4,361	15.10%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	5,552	19.20%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	3,357	11.60%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	2,806	9.70%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	760	2.60%
\$200,000 or more	401	1.40%
Median household income (dollars)	44,428	(X)
Mean household income (dollars)	56,181	(X)

Source: U.S.

In spite of a demonstrated need for affordable housing in Van Buren County, the median house value has increased by nearly \$90,000 since 1980 as seen in Figure 9. This increase is somewhat correlated with increased income levels, the housing boom, and the increased development of properties on inland lakes and Lake Michigan. Increasing poverty levels and sensitive populations (elderly and children) means there may be a need for additional programs & services.

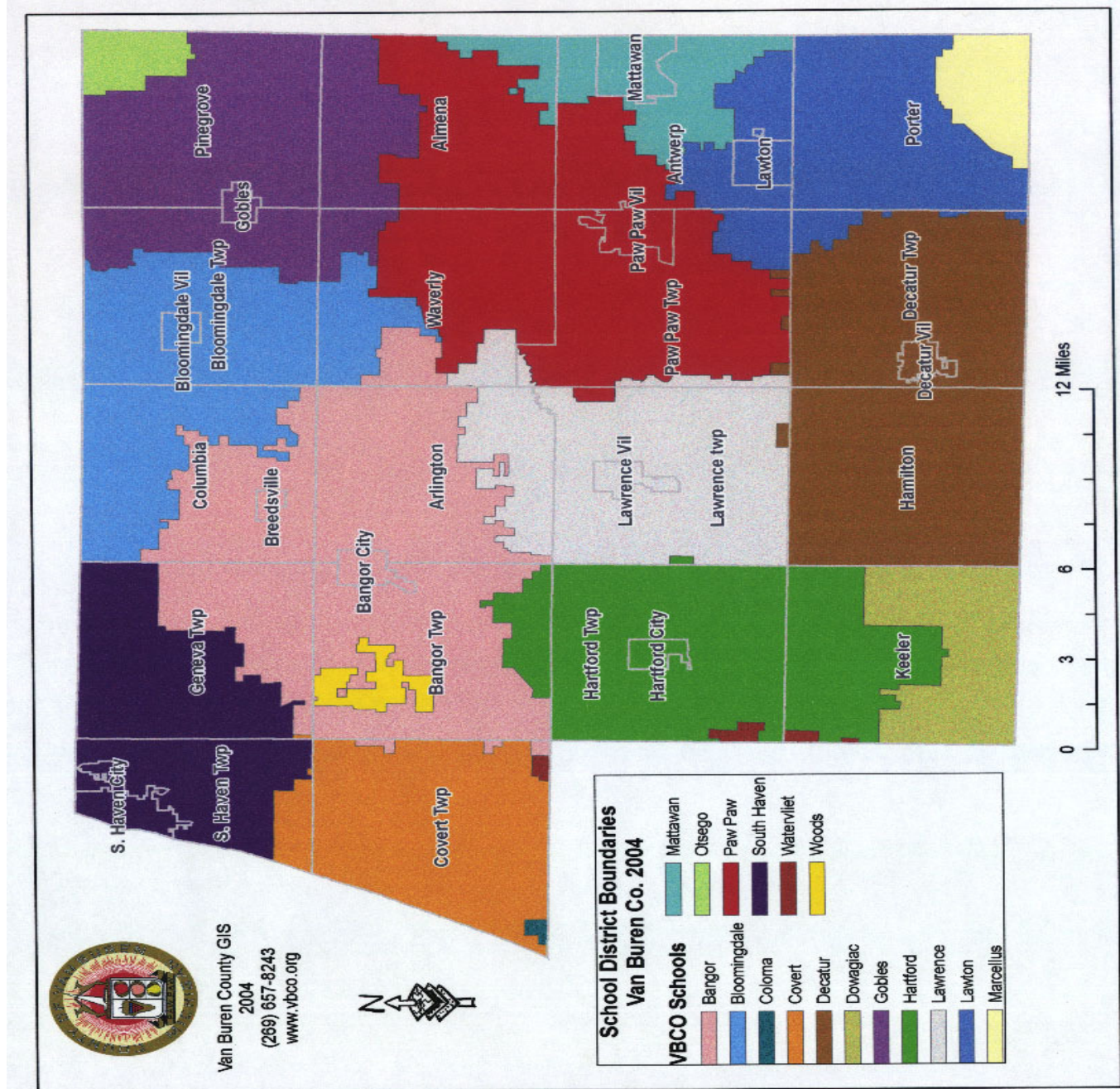
Figure 9

While the continued development and renovation of affordable housing in Van Buren County remains important, the county encourages low impact development strategies such as those described in the section on *Agricultural Lands, Open Space, and Farmland Preservation* in order to preserve farmland and natural features throughout the county.

Chapter 4 – Education, Health, and Safety

There are 17 public school districts located within Van Buren County, but 12 are part of the Van Buren Intermediate School District. According to the 2010 Census, nearly 20,000 residents are enrolled in some form of educational opportunities, and 14,393 are enrolled in grades 1-12 in a county public school. In addition, Census 2010 reported that 17.3% of the population between the ages of 18 and 24 were enrolled in college or graduate studies. Maps 14 displays the school districts in Van Buren and Map 15 shows all school district boundaries the full extent of the school districts in VBISD

Map 13



Map 15

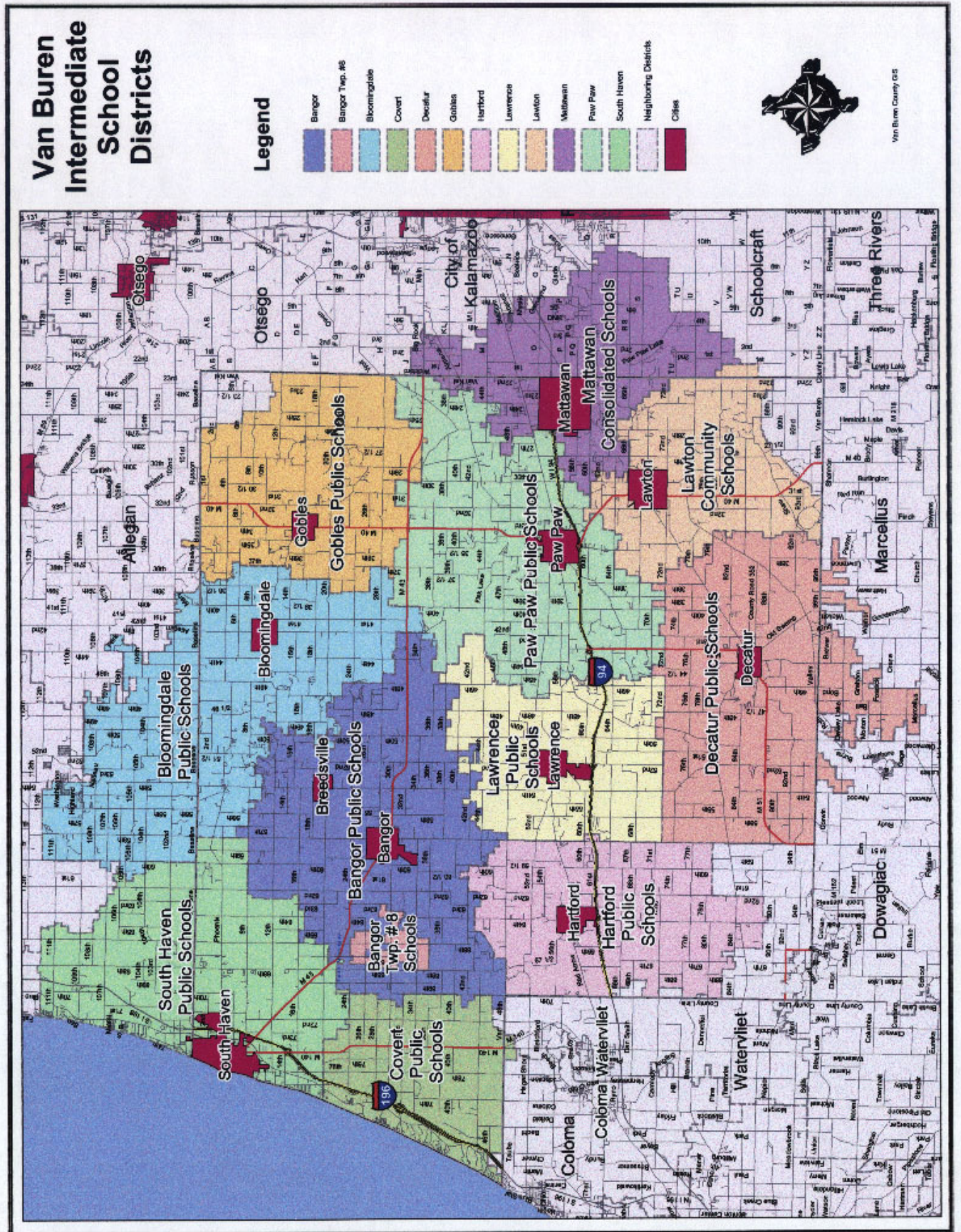


Table 9 provides a more detailed description of county school enrollment:

Table 9

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT	Number	Percent
Population 3 years and over enrolled in school	19,777	19,777
Nursery school, preschool	1,489	7.50%
Kindergarten	1,254	6.30%
Elementary school (grades 1-8)	8,716	44.10%
High school (grades 9-12)	4,901	24.80%
College or graduate school	3,417	17.30%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010

Table 10

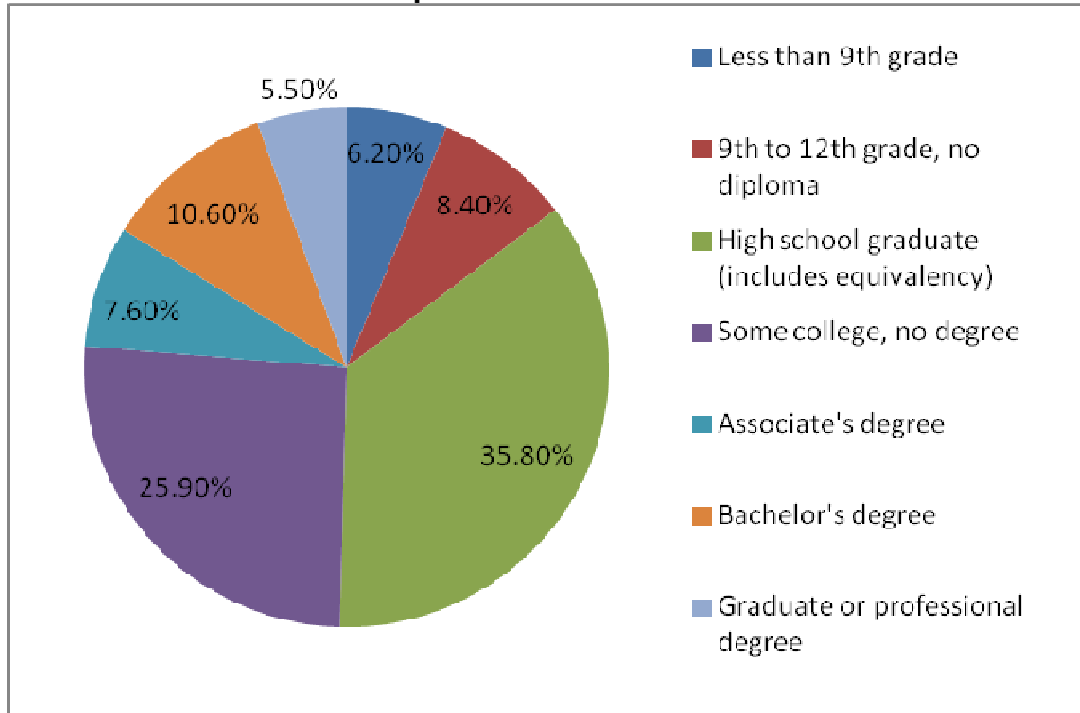
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT		
Population 25 years and over	51,115	51,115
Less than 9th grade	6.20%	3,194
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	8.40%	4,272
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	35.80%	18,277
Some college, no degree	25.90%	13,258
Associate's degree	7.60%	3,884
Bachelor's degree	10.60%	5,402
Graduate or professional degree	5.50%	2,828
Percent high school graduate or higher	85.40%	(X)
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	16.10%	(X)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010

Analysis of educational attainment statistics from the 2010 Census for the county population greater than 25 years of age reveals that 85.4% has received at least a high school diploma, an increase of over 5% from 2000. In addition, 23.7% of the population over the age of 25 has completed the necessary requirements for a college degree (associate, bachelor or graduate). Figure 10 below displays a complete percentage breakdown of the educational attainment levels of the population over 25 in Van Buren County.

When comparing the 2010 educational attainment statistics to the same 2000 attainment numbers, it can be seen that the county has witnessed an overall increase in the percentage of population with a higher level of education. Figure 11 shows in greater detail the educational attainment by sex and race. When looking at these figures the Hispanic population numbers are glaring, as nearly 2/3 of the adult population has less than a high school education.

Figure 6
Educational Attainment Population 25 and over 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010

Table 11

Sex By Educational Attainment For The Population 25 Years And Over
Michigan: Van Buren County

Powered by The American Community Survey

	Total										
		Male					Female				
			Less than high school diploma	High school graduate, GED, or alternative	Some college or associate's degree	Bachelor's degree or higher		Less than high school diploma	High school graduate, GED, or alternative	Some college or associate's degree	Bachelor's degree or higher
White	45,975	22,370	3,207	7,896	7,048	4,219	23,605	2,891	8,161	8,111	4,442
Black or African American	2,075	967	158	446	291	72	1,108	207	546	181	174
American Indian and Alaska Native	388	231	58	95	73	5	157	67	46	35	9
Asian	227	66	21	11	0	34	161	53	0	85	23
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Some Other Race	1,617	868	612	122	129	5	749	481	134	121	13
Two Or More Races	589	257	34	117	89	17	332	39	112	143	38
Hispanic or Latino	3,283	1,766	1,164	283	276	43	1,517	876	351	219	71

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

A '0' margin of error indicates this estimate was set equal to a population control, and therefore is without sampling error.

An 'N' indicates that this geographic area has too few sample cases to display an estimate. An '(X)' means no estimate applies.

Except where noted, 'race' refers to people reporting only one race. 'Hispanic' refers to an ethnic category; Hispanics may be of any race.

Margins of error will be included in the spreadsheet in a future release of Easy Stats.

Health and Safety

Hospitals

There are two hospitals housed within Van Buren County, South Haven Community Hospital and Bronson Lakeview-Hospital, located in Paw Paw. Contact information is listed below, and more information can be found by visiting each hospital's website. In addition, nearby hospitals not residing in the county include Borgess Health Alliance and Bronson Health, both in Kalamazoo, Allegan General located in Allegan and Community Hospital in Watervliet.

Van Buren County Hospitals:

South Haven Community Hospital

955 S BAILEY AVE
SOUTH HAVEN, MI 49090
269-637-5271
<http://www.shch.org/>

Bronson Lakeview Hospital

408 HAZEN STREET
PAW PAW, MI 49079
269-657-1400
<http://www.bronsonhealth.com/>

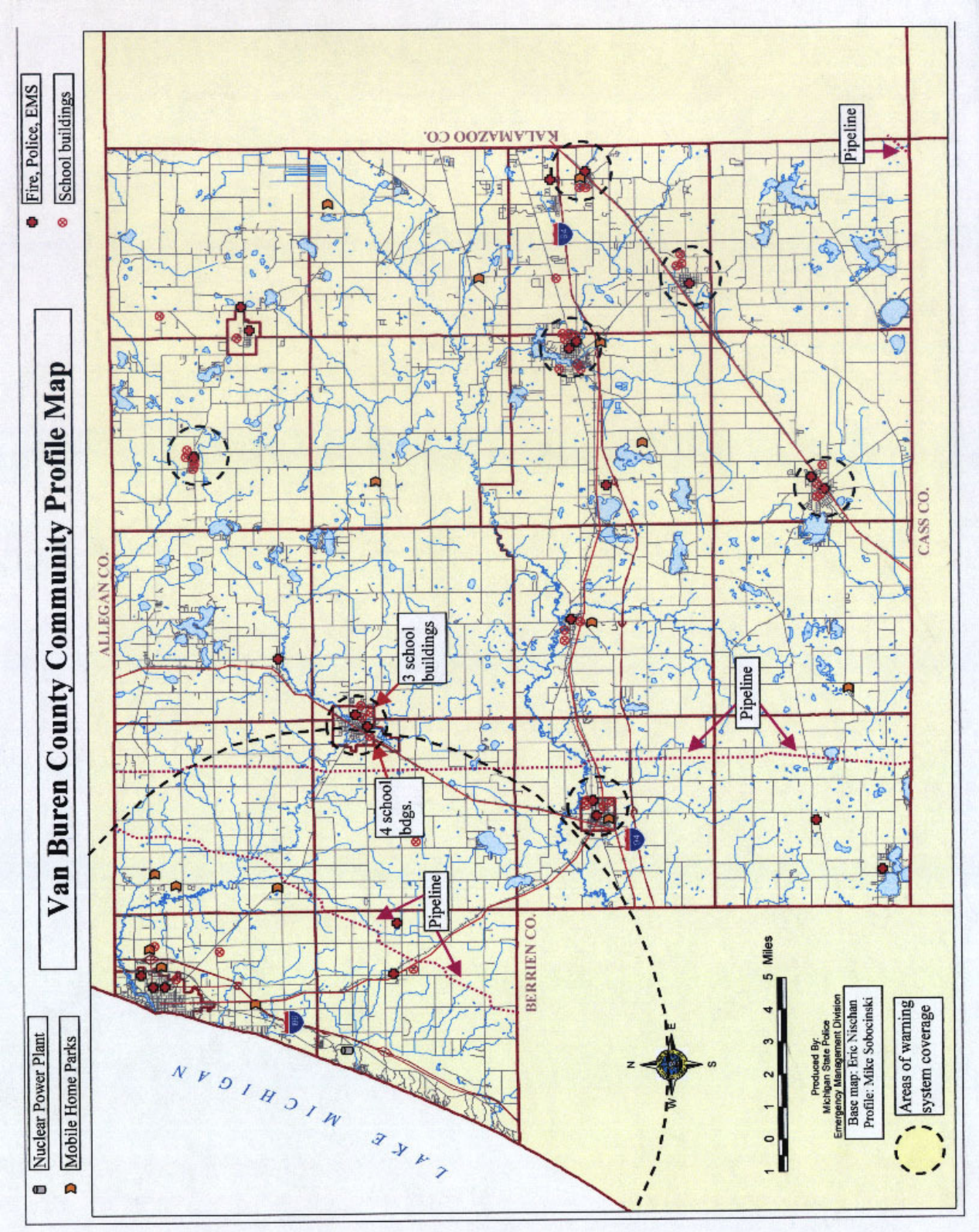
Furthermore, because the county faces an aging population, it is important to note that a number of services are available to senior citizens. Among others, these include nursing homes, assisted living, nutrition assistance, and hospice. More information on service availability and locations can be found at www.vbco.org/senior_services.asp and through the Region IV Area Agency on Aging (<http://www.region-iv.org/index.html>).

Emergency Preparedness

The Van Buren County Office of Domestic Preparedness is a division of the Van Buren County Sheriff's Department handling Emergency Preparedness, mitigation, response recovery, training and homeland security initiatives for Van Buren County. More information can be found regarding the Van Buren County Office of Domestic Preparedness at <http://www.vanburencountysheriff.com/domestic.htm> .

Van Buren County has an array of public emergency facilities and other buildings of interest in times of emergency. In addition the County houses a nuclear power facility and has an audible warning system. Map 14 is a community profile map of Van Buren County and displays building of public interests from schools to fire police and EMS facilities.

Map 15



Chapter 5 –Economic, Labor, and Income Profile

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 21,844 jobs in Van Buren County in 2010. Of these 76.7% were in the private sector and 23.3% were in the government sector. Over half of the jobs were in service related industries, while agriculture represents about 9% of the total and manufacturing around 11.5%.

Table 12. & Figure 7

Employment & Wages by Industry, 2010 (2011 \$s)

	Employment	% of Total Employment	Avg. Annual Wages	% Above or Below Avg.
Total	21,844		\$37,019	
Private	16,753	76.7%	\$35,774	-3.4%
Non-Services Related	5,119	23.4%	\$35,723	-3.5%
Natural Resources and Mining	1,960	9.0%	\$20,580	-44.4%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting	1,960	9.0%	\$20,580	-44.4%
Mining (incl. fossil fuels)	0	0.0%	\$0	-100.0%
Construction	640	2.9%	\$42,087	13.7%
Manufacturing (incl. forest products)	2,520	11.5%	\$45,871	23.9%
Services Related	11,634	53.3%	\$35,795	-3.3%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	3,970	18.2%	\$40,934	10.6%
Information	82	0.4%	\$47,838	29.2%
Financial Activities	1,004	4.6%	\$36,751	-0.7%
Professional and Business Services	2,502	11.5%	\$54,089	46.1%
Education and Health Services	1,483	6.8%	\$29,991	-19.0%
Leisure and Hospitality	2,103	9.6%	\$11,744	-68.3%
Other Services	485	2.2%	\$17,509	-52.7%
Unclassified	5	0.0%	\$24,253	-34.5%
Government	5,091	23.3%	\$41,117	11.1%
Federal Government	183	0.8%	\$41,855	13.1%
State Government	199	0.9%	\$58,774	58.8%
Local Government	4,709	21.6%	\$40,343	9.0%

This table shows wage data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which does not report data for proprietors or the value of benefits and uses slightly different industry categories than those shown on previous pages of this report.

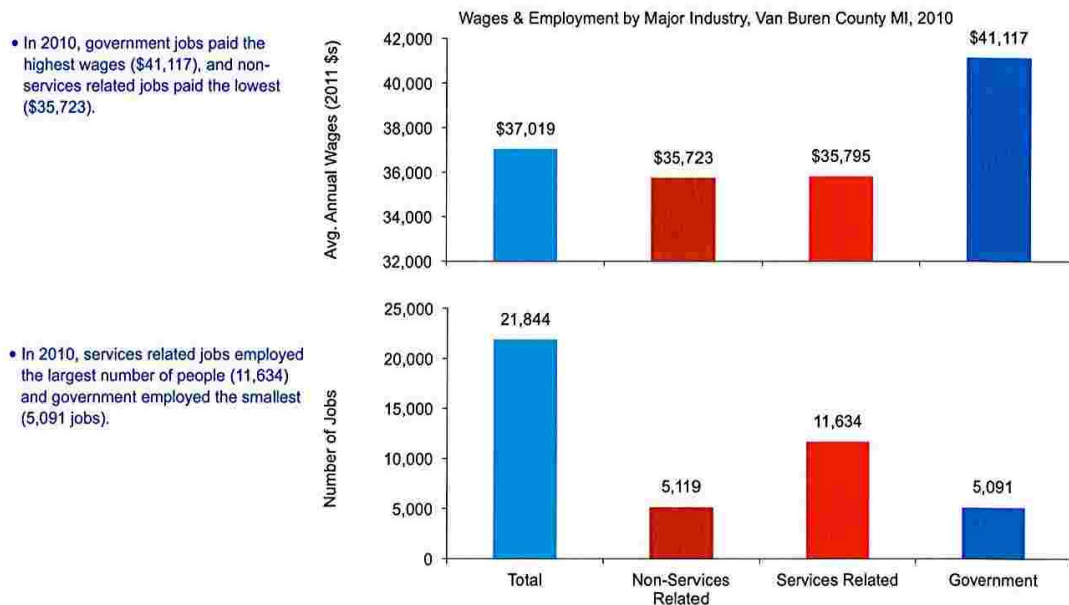


Table 13

Total Counts of Employed Residents in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties from 2002, 2006-2010 and Percent Change 2002-2010⁹								
	2002	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2002-2010	% Change from Total 2002 Workforce
Berrien	67,743	69,717	65,801	62,440	61,898	62,076	-5,667	-8.4
Cass	23,003	23,252	24,131	22,274	20,369	20,184	-2,819	-12.3
Van Buren	31,837	32,585	30,340	28,755	28,989	28,527	-3,310	-10.4
Southwest Michigan	122,583	125,554	120,272	113,469	111,256	110,787	-11,796	-9.6

Table 9: Total Counts of Employed Residents in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties from 2002, 2006-2010 and Percent Change 2002-2010

There were 28,527 employed residents in Van Buren County in 2010. That was over a 10% decline from the 2002 figure. Nearly half of the jobs lost in this time period were in the Manufacturing sector.

Of the 28,527 employed residents, only about 10,000 actually work in the county. Many of the residents moved out of cities and built in rural bedroom communities but still work outside the county. Many work in places such as Berrien County, Kalamazoo County, and Northern Indiana.

Table 14

Inflow/Outflow Job Counts, Southwest Michigan (Includes Primary and Secondary Jobs)¹⁰				
	2010	2009	2008	2002
Berrien County				
Live and Work in the Area	38,405	38,891	38,924	44,822
Live Outside but Work in the Area	20,018	20,041	20,609	16,563
Live in but Work Outside the Area	23,671	23,007	23,516	22,921
Employed Residents-to-Jobs Ratio	0.94	0.95	0.95	0.91
Cass County				
Live and Work in the Area	4,018	3,706	4,381	6200
Live Outside but Work in the Area	3,873	3,374	4,202	4,107
Live in but Work Outside the Area	16,166	16,663	17,893	16803
Employed Residents-to-Jobs Ratio	0.39	0.35	0.39	0.45
Van Buren				
Live and Work in the Area	9,788	10,177	10,114	11,881
Live Outside but Work in the Area	8,797	9,031	8,156	7,807
Live in but Work Outside the Area	18,739	18,812	18,641	19,956
Employed Residents-to-Jobs Ratio	0.65	0.66	0.64	0.62

Source of Table 14 & 15 SWMPC CEDS repost

Agriculture has been a dominant factor in the economic base and lifestyles of the residents of Van Buren County for many years. Table 16 breaks down Agricultural products and their ranking in the state as well as the country according to the 2007 USDA Agricultural Census. Van Buren County ranks very high in several categories including Berries, Fruits, Vegetables, Nursery/Greenhouse, and Cut Christmas trees. In addition, many major

employers are tied to fruit or other agricultural production and processing (see Table 16).

Table 15

Ranked items among the 83 state counties and 3,079 U.S. counties, 2007			
MARKET VALUE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS SOLD (\$1,000)	Quantity	State Rank	U.S. Rank
Total value of agricultural products sold	173,472	9	426
Value of crops including nursery and greenhouse	142,654	4	182
Value of livestock, poultry, and their products	30,818	26	1,169
VALUE OF SALES BY COMMODITY GROUP (\$1,000)			
Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, and dry peas	23,944	29	914
Tobacco	-	-	-
Cotton and cottonseed	-	-	-
Vegetables, melons, potatoes, and sweet potatoes	20,119	3	108
Fruits, tree nuts, and berries	81,485	1	47
Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, and sod	14,794	11	215
Cut Christmas trees and short rotation woody crops	(D)	7	(D)
Other crops and hay	(D)	37	(D)
Poultry and eggs	587	15	1,089
Cattle and calves	3,047	38	2,055
Milk and other dairy products from cows	20,036	24	298
Hogs and pigs	6,515	15	471
Sheep, goats, and their products	(D)	(D)	(D)
Horses, ponies, mules, burros, and donkeys	173	41	1,239
Aquaculture	(D)	6	(D)
Other animals and other animal products	14	78	1,923
TOP CROP ITEMS (acres)			
Corn for grain	44,259	25	642
Soybeans for beans	26,843	28	734
Forage -land used for all hay and haylage, grass silage, and greenchop	12,704	42	1,472
Land in berries	8,800	1	7
Vegetables harvested for sale	8,509	4	110
TOP LIVESTOCK INVENTORY ITEMS (number)			
Hogs and pigs	20,075	15	522
Cattle and calves	10,855	31	1,930
Pheasants	(D)	10	(D)
Turkeys	(D)	9	309
Layers	2,420	32	1035

Source: 2007 Census of Agriculture

While many farms in the county sold less than \$20,000 in 2007, there was an increase in the number of farms that sold more than \$100,000, indicating a strong presence of larger, profitable farmers in Van Buren County. Net cash farm income nearly doubled since from 2002 to 2007.

Table 16

Economic Characteristics	
Farms by value of sales	Quantity
Less than \$1,000	358
\$1,000 to \$2,499	113
\$2,500 to \$4,999	120
\$5,000 to \$9,999	112
\$10,000 to \$19,999	75
\$20,000 to \$24,999	36
\$25,000 to \$39,999	74
\$40,000 to \$49,999	36
\$50,000 to \$99,999	110
\$100,000 to \$249,999	82
\$250,000 to \$499,999	45
\$500,000 or more	71
Total farm production expenses (\$1,000)	129,967
Average per farm (\$)	105,493
Net cash farm income of operation (\$1,000)	51,251
Average per farm (\$)	41,600

Source: 2007 Census of Agriculture

Furthermore, regional fruit markets have been a significant outlet for Van Buren County fruit growers. The Benton Harbor fruit market is important for wholesale buyers, and other markets, such as those in Kalamazoo and Holland are important for consumers. Over the past decade local farmer markets are growing in number and have provided another way for the local growers to sell their wares.

For more information and data on agricultural production in Van Buren County visit the USDA Census of Agriculture website at <http://www.agcensus.usda.gov>

The largest employers in Van Buren County are provided in Table 17, below

Table 17

NAME	2010	2012
MPI Research, Inc.	1500	1350
Entergy Nuclear Palisades LLC	550	650
Bronson Lakeview Hospital	700	626
Van Buren County ISD	435	479
Coca Cola Co	505	431
Mattawan Consolidated Schools	420	420
South Haven Hospital	400	420
Van Buren County	281	293
South Haven Schools	na	269
Welch's	331	260
Village Market	199	221

The largest employers in Van Buren County and beyond cover an array of industries and occupations, in addition to the occupations available in health care and the public sector. According to the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, (<http://www.upjohninst.org/regional/June2005Busout.pdf>), employment gains in Western Michigan are, in fact, found most often in the service-providing sector.

Unemployment and Poverty

Since 1990, unemployment rates in Van Buren County have remained slightly above the State of Michigan rates. Figure 15 breaks down the impoverished population by age. The unemployment rate in 2012 was still at 9.5%.

Figure 8

Percentage of impoverished population

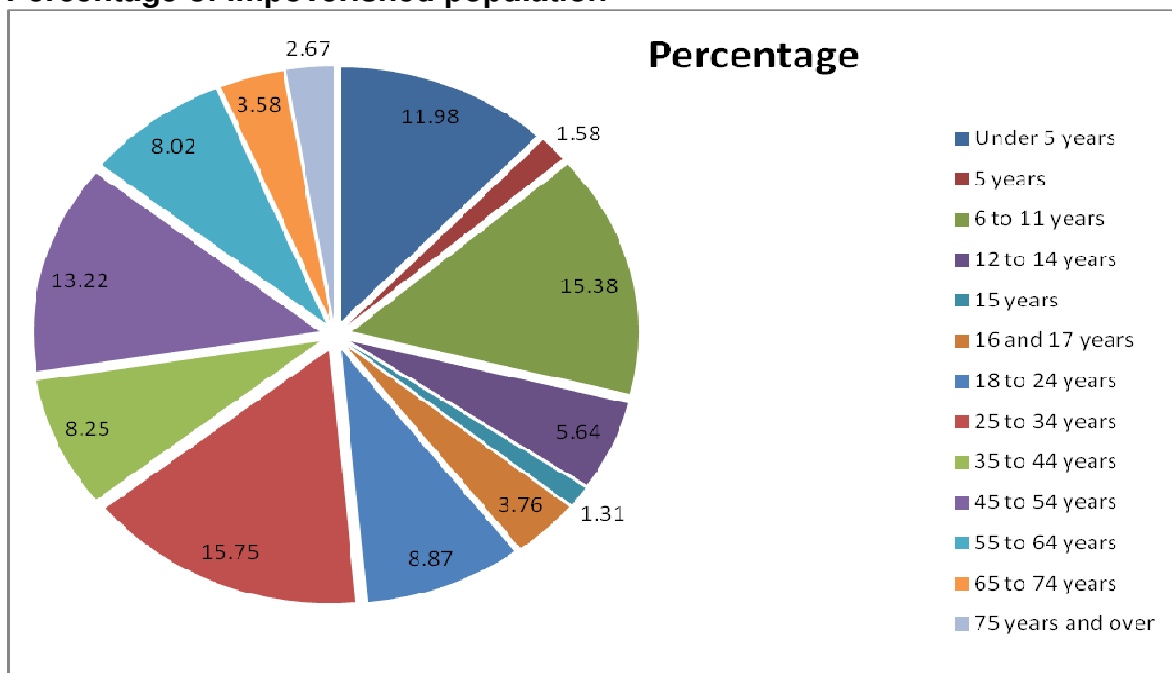
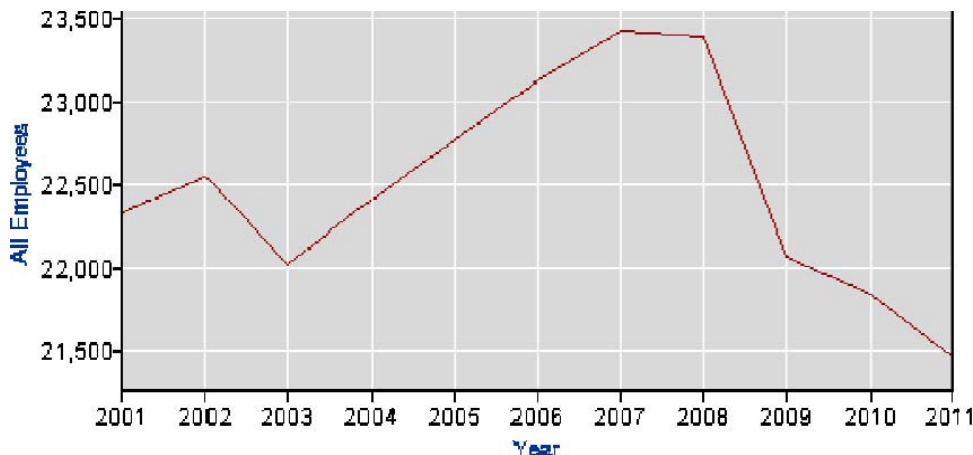


Figure 16

Data extracted on: May 31, 2013 (10:17:11 AM) **Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Series Id:** ENU2615910010 **State:** Michigan **Area:** Van Buren County, Michigan **Industry:** Total, all industries **Owner:** Total Covered **Size:** All establishment sizes **Type:** All Employees

Van Buren County had worked hard on tackling poverty and since 1995, and had seen some positive results lowering the poverty rate from 16% to 11.1% however the loss of jobs (indicated in Table 20 and figure 16) over the latter part of the decade eliminated these gains.. Figure 16 shows the incline and decline of the number of jobs from 2001 – 2011 and Table 20 shows the breakdown of the impoverished population.

Table 18

PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES AND PEOPLE WHOSE INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS IS BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL	
All families	13.20%
With related children under 18 years	21.50%
With related children under 5 years only	25.30%
Married couple families	7.40%
With related children under 18 years	11.20%
With related children under 5 years only	11.30%
Families with female householder, no husband present	37.50%
With related children under 18 years	48.20%
With related children under 5 years only	63.80%
All people	18.90%
Under 18 years	26.90%
Related children under 18 years	26.10%
Related children under 5 years	34.30%
Related children 5 to 17 years	23.40%
18 years and over	16.20%
18 to 64 years	17.00%
65 years and over	12.30%
People in families	15.40%
Unrelated individuals 15 years and over	

U.S. Census 2010

Coordinated Economic Development Efforts

In order to ensure a viable economic future, the county encourages regional planning efforts. One such effort has been the Red Arrow Corridor Study, which was conducted in December of 2001. Facilitated by staff from the Michigan State University Extension (MSUE), six communities along Red Arrow Highway (Mattawan, Paw Paw, Lawrence, Hartford, Watervliet, and Coloma) participated in a review process that was designed to “address common community and economic development issues.” Community Assessment Team (CAT) members, which included specialists in community and economic development, traveled throughout the communities and recorded their observations, common themes, and unique features. Then, the CAT met with local officials to discuss their observations, and a document was developed in order to report the findings of the study.

Each community was offered a sense of its current economic picture, strengths and weaknesses, and recommendations for future efforts. While each community has unique assets and needs, several common themes were identified:

- Agriculture, including festivals, U-picks, wineries, fall colors
- Water, including the Paw Paw River
- Healthcare, with connections to two prominent regional health care providers
- Antiques and specialty stores
- Ethnic specialty and recognized foods and restaurants, while limited, are present
- Cultural/Historical connections, including local historical sites, museums, and transportation routes
- Recreation, including water sports, camping, raceways, and festivals

In conclusion, the study encouraged continuation of coordinated planning and marketing efforts. Specific suggestions included formally reviewing marketing capacity and customer knowledge, supporting technical training for community leaders and volunteers, conducting regional inventories of land, building, infrastructure, workforce, etc. capacities, reviewing master plans to encourage coordinated planning, enforcing ordinances and maintaining public spaces to improve downtown aesthetics, exploring connections to trails, and utilizing outside resources from organizations, including federal, state, and local governments.

While some of the communities have taken steps toward improvements suggested by the study, the county encourages additional efforts to comply with recommendations outlined by the CAT. This will not only benefit each local entity, but will be advantageous to the region as a whole.

Chapter 6 – Community Facilities and Services, Transportation, and Recreation

County Facilities

The Van Buren County Seat is Located in Paw Paw, MI and many county facilities are located within the village.

County Courthouse

Paw Paw has been the county seat since 1837, and Van Buren County officials occupied the first county courthouse (the present Paw Paw City Hall) in 1845. However, in 1900, when the board of supervisors decided to build a new courthouse, it considered moving the county seat. Among others, South Haven, the county's largest town, vied fiercely for the designation, but in a countywide election on April 1, 1901, citizens voted to keep the county seat in Paw Paw.

On September 2, 1901, Frank O. Gilbert, the Grand Master of the Free and Accepted Masons, laid the cornerstone for the present courthouse. Members of the Grand Army of the Republic and fraternal organizations marched through the town in celebration. The Paw Paw True Northerner estimated that between 8,000 and 10,000 people attended the ceremony. The monumental Classical Revival building designed by Jackson architect Claire Allen, was dedicated on February 23, 1903. The Sheldon and Oradell Rupert memorial clock was installed in the tower in 1986. Both of Van Buren's courthouses are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The total cost of the present Courthouse and the old Jail (described below) was \$120,000. In 1999, the Courthouse restructuring and repair project was completed. The upper and lower domes of the Courthouse had to be removed from the top of the building, and the project was completed at a cost of \$249,654.



Photo: Van Buren County Courthouse

County Jail

Dedicated January 26, 1963 a \$4,000,000 addition to the County Jail was completed with the final architect fee retired at the 1963 June session of Van Buren County Board of Supervisors. This addition adjoined the old Jail and housed an additional 55 prisoners. In May of 1981 remodeling of this addition was contracted for \$134,141 and completed in 1982. Renovation of the old Jail was completed in 1987 at costs of approximately \$180,000 and is used for out-county prisoners board. In 2001 another addition and remodeling of the jail was completed, the County Building Authority secured bonds for \$1,935,000 for cost.



Photo: Van Buren County Jail (Courthouse in the Background)

Courthouse Annex Building

The Courthouse Annex was dedicated in July 1976 and houses 7th District Court East on the main floor. In September 1977 the Probate and Juvenile Courts moved in on the second floor. The total cost of the Annex Building was \$663,000. At the end of 2000 the original County Records Building located on Main Street in Paw Paw was damaged extensively by fire. The State Probation offices located in that building had to be moved and now occupy part of the lower level in Courthouse and Annex Building.

DHS, Health Department, Mental Health and Animal Shelter

The Department of Social Services and Health Department Building located on C.R. 681 in Hartford was put into use in May 1974 at a cost of \$446,000 and an addition in October 1978 was completed at a cost of \$605,000. In 1991 the County completed construction of a new building located on C.R. 681 to house the Department of Human Services (formerly the Family Independence Agency) and the 1974 building was renovated to house the Public and Mental Health. Bonding in the amount of \$3,900,000 was obtained for new construction.

The Animal Shelter located off C.R. 681 at Hartford was constructed in January 1978 at a cost of \$125,000.

Human Services East Building

The County Annexed 21.5 acres of Paw Paw Township property to the Village of Paw Paw and purchased the land on Hazen Street in 1989 for future expansion. The first building dedicated October 26, 1990 housed the County Cooperative Extension Service, Community Mental Health and satellite Public Health Office on this property. The County bonded for this first building in the amount of \$2,200,000. In the year 2000 the county erected a new Maintenance Building on the property at a cost of \$139,425.



Photo: Human Services East

County Building West

The Van Buren County Building West at 1007 East Wells Street in South Haven was dedicated in June 1980 at a cost of \$745,000. This building houses the 7th District Court West and a branch office of the Prosecuting Attorney. In 1988 the lower level of this building was assigned to the Mental Health Department for offices at a remodeling cost of \$215,000.

County Administration/Land Services Building

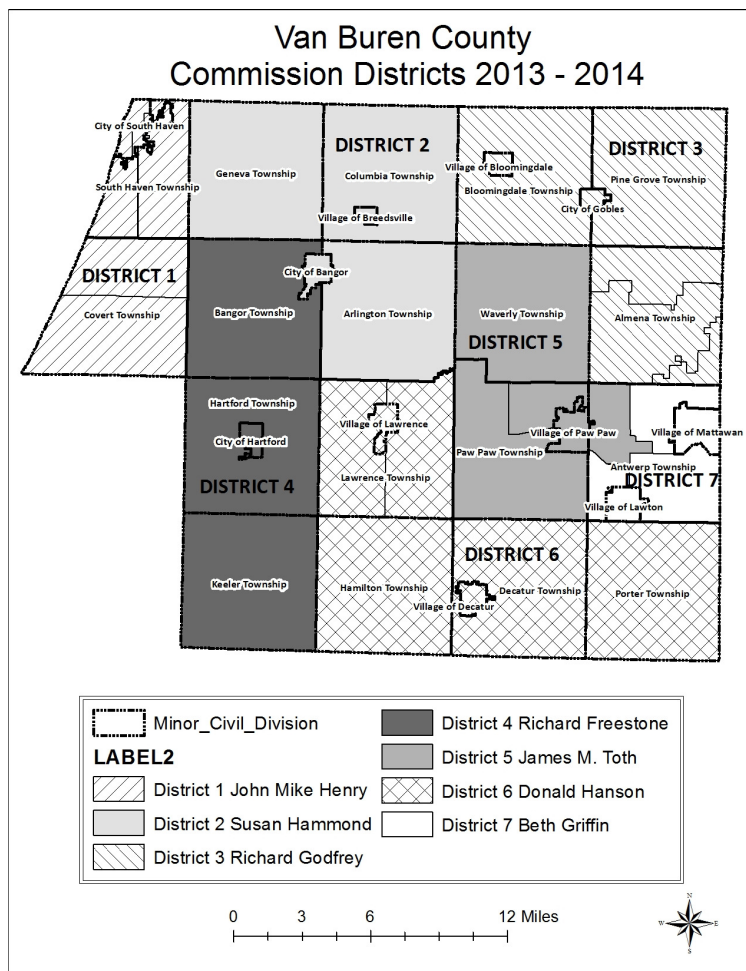
The County purchased the building at 219 Paw Paw Street in November 1997 for \$1,440,000 and named it "Van Buren County Administration/Land Services Building" in 1998. In 1999 vault construction and renovation of the building at a cost of \$1,355,567 was completed. In November 1999 the County Register of Deeds and County Treasurer Offices moved to the main floor of this building, and the County Administrator's Office, Information Services Office and Board of Commissioners moved to the 2nd floor. The Board of Commissioners held their first board meeting in their new meeting room in January 2000 followed by an Open House. Remodeling costs totaled \$1,368,550 including furnishings. Occupants on the third floor are the offices of County Equalization, GIS, the County Drain Commissioner and the Surveyor. The lower level of the building is occupied by the Friend of the Court Office and that was remodeled in 2000 at an approximate cost of \$125,873.

Van Buren County Governmental Departments

Board of Commissioners

The Board of Commissioners is an elected body that was established to conduct the business operations and establish the legislative agenda for Van Buren County. There are seven members elected from districts of approximately the same population size. Following the decennial census, an apportionment commission meets and reapportions the County into the appropriate districts. The Board meets twice a month as a Committee of the Whole where discussion of sub-committee items takes place and twice a month as a Board of Commissioners where action is taken. Their primary job is to adopt policies and ordinances to govern the County and its activities including an annual budget. The vision of the Board of Commissioners is to establish Van Buren County as a progressive county that is responsive to its citizens needs. The mission is to be sensitive to economic, safety, and environmental issues; and encouraging the use of planning, new technology, and creative solutions in meeting County goals. Map 15 displays the 2004 Van Buren County Commissioner Districts.

Map 16



Administration

The County Administrator is the chief administrative official of the County and is appointed by the Board of Commissioners. He administers adopted policies and budget on a day-to-day basis, as well as supervising the work of appointed department heads.

The Administration Office also handles the Safety and Health Promotion programs, purchasing, preparation of the Board of Commissioners agenda and packet, liability and workers compensation insurance, and the Human Resources.

Judicial

The Court system consists of the following: Thirty-Sixth Judicial Circuit Court including the Family Court, Probate Court, and District Courts – East and West. The Circuit Court is split between two elected judges. One does all criminal and civil cases, while the other does all domestic relations cases, some neglect and abuse cases, some delinquency and guardianship cases as well as some mentally ill petitions. The Van Buren Probate Court is the Court that supervises minor and adult guardianships and conservatorships, trust, wills, legal change of name, mentally ill, affidavits of parentage, estates, and civil disputes involving estates. The Probate Judge now serves two-thirds of his time in the Family Division of the Circuit Court handling mostly delinquency and abuse and neglect cases and some domestic relations cases. Van Buren County's District Court is the 7th District and is divided into two divisions: District Court East in Paw Paw and District Court West in South Haven. The District Court is the first level of court for both civil and criminal matters. In civil litigation, the District Court has jurisdiction if the amount is less than \$25,000. District Court judges also conduct preliminary examinations and arraignments in felony cases. Other operations include a traffic bureau and small claims court.

County Clerk

The County Clerk, an elected official, is a constitutional office with a four-year term. The State statute prescribes the duties. The County Clerk as Clerk of the Circuit Court, has control of court files, and maintains all case filings, oaths, and the Circuit Court Seal. The County Clerk is Register of County Vital Statistics. Records and indices are maintained on all County vital statistics (e.g., births, deaths, and marriages). The County Clerk is also Clerk of the County Board of Commissioners. Duties for this function include preparation of the minutes of the Board, present communications, and comply with directives of the Board. As Chief Election Officer for the County, the County Clerk supervises elections, acts as filing official for County Petitions as well as filing officer under the Campaign Finance Act. The countywide voter registration listing is maintained on the statewide QVF computer system. The Clerk is a member of the County Election Commission, acts as Clerk for the County Election Scheduling Committee and for the County Election Board of Canvassers. The Clerk is also responsible for preparation of all accounts payable checks, and accepts vouchers to pay invoices from all departments. Various other duties include acting as Clerk of the Gun Board, filing Assumed Named Certificates, processing passports and notary

commissions, participating as a member of the County Plat Board and County Apportionment Commission, and filing Veteran's Discharges.

Prosecuting Attorney

The Van Buren County Prosecutor is an elected position, responsible for statutory duties and the daily operations of the Prosecutor's Office. The primary charge of the Prosecutor is to review complaints to determine if adequate facts exist and appropriate procedures were taken to charge an individual for criminal wrongdoing. Thereafter, the Prosecutor determines the charges to be brought against each perpetrator. Following conviction, the Prosecutor may also recommend sentencing to the Court.

Register of Deeds

State law prescribes the duties of this elective, four-year term office: official recording and/or filing office for all legal documents affecting Real Property. Examples include sheriff's deeds, mortgages, assignments of mortgages, discharge of mortgages, patents, oil and gas leases, plats and restrictions, rights of way, various liens, Circuit Court orders, Probate orders and wills where real estate is concerned, and Survey Certificates. State law establishes all fees for recording and/or filing. Revenues are turned over the County General Fund. The Register of Deeds is Chairman of the County Plat Board, which approves all new subdivision within Van Buren County. Finally, the Register of Deeds serves the public with research on all instruments.

Treasurer

State law and authorization of the County Board of Commissioners provide the duties of the County Treasurer. The two main roles of the Treasurer are the custodian of all County funds and the collector of taxes. The County receives money from several sources. The principle source is an ad valorem property tax. Other income is received from grants, interest, and various fees. Besides revenue items, the Treasurer is responsible for accounts in trust and agency funds. In Van Buren County, the Treasurer is also a member of the Building Authority.

Drain Commissioner

The County Drain Commissioner acts under Public Act 40 of 1956, as amended, and has jurisdiction over all county drains. There are more than 540 county drains in Van Buren County. Drains may be open channels, enclosed in tile, or a combination to allow for the flow of storm water to a suitable outlet. A distinction is made between drains within the County (intra-county) and drains shared with neighboring Counties (inter-county). The County Drain Commissioner works with local property owners, county municipalities, the Soil Erosion & Sedimentation Control Agent, the County Road Commission, the Michigan Department of Transportation, and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. When improved storm water drainage is wanted, a petition may be made by municipalities or by the drainage district landowners to the County Drain Commission. The process includes: application and petition, public notice,

approval by a Board of Determination, release of landowner right of ways, notice of assessment, receipt of bids, letting of construction contract, review of apportionment, and assessment to tax bills.

Sheriff Department

The Sheriff Department operates many different divisions in the name of Public Safety. The Road Patrol responsibilities include patrolling, accident investigation, criminal investigation, traffic enforcement, and other law enforcement related activities. The Marine Division patrols 113 County inland lakes as well as Lake Michigan and the Black River. The Marine Division enforces State Marine Laws and does watercraft safety inspections as well as conducting boating and water safety classes. The dive team performs rescue and body recovery throughout the year. The Sheriff Department also has separate contracts with various municipalities. The Corrections Department maintains security and provides a safe living condition for inmates as well as employees. Other responsibilities include the alternative work program and the Emergency Management office.

State Probation Office

The State Probation Office provides two basic services to Van Buren County. The first is the completion of persistence and investigation reports. The report aids judges in sentencing. The second service is the supervision of all adult offenders sentenced to probation by the Van Buren County Circuit Court as well as offenders who are residents of Van Buren County who have been placed on probation elsewhere. The staff members are employees of the Michigan Department of Corrections. Van Buren County provides office space and equipment.

Equalization

State law mandates the duties of the Equalization Department. Property values are determined by monitoring the sales of residential, agricultural, commercial, and industrial lands. Appraisal studies are done in the agricultural, commercial, and industrial classes by visitation to the various properties to determine the level of assessment by the local assessor. This study provides for uniformity between all cities and townships within the County, making sure each assessing unit is equalized at true cash value.

Michigan State University Extension

The mission of the Michigan State University Extension office is to help people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs, and opportunities. Extension provides information and offers on-going educational programs in three areas: Agriculture and Natural Resources; Children, Youth and Family; and Community and Economic Development. These programs have similar goals. They seek to help people better understand their environment, make the best possible use of their resources, and enhance the quality of lives for themselves, their families and their communities through education and wise decision making.

Information Services

The Van Buren County Information Services Department is responsible for voice and data communication within the County operations. This includes all maintenance, upkeep, and repair of equipment including personal computers, file servers, midrange computers (AS/400), network equipment, and other voice and data equipment located within County locations. The Information Services Department is responsible for the upkeep and training for all operating systems. The Information Services Department also provides support of local taxing units by way of computer support, annual printer maintenance contracts, and input of yearly database and related information from Resource Software for taxing purposes. The Information Services Department also serves as a resource for information regarding computer and related items. The philosophy of the Information Services Department is to strive to provide Van Buren County with a structurally sound department that is always on the move to become better, more efficient and able to handle the needs of the ever-changing work environment of today.

Building & Grounds

The Building & Grounds Department maintains all equipment, plumbing, heating, air conditioning, electrical, and general upkeep of all County buildings. There are thirteen County buildings (310,000 square feet). The Building & Grounds Department also takes care of County landscaping needs (325,000 square feet) and parking lot maintenance (480,000 square feet).

Animal Control

The Animal Control office handles all domestic animal complaints including animals running at large and cruelties to animals. Animal bites are documented and animals are checked for rabies, vaccinations and licenses. There is a kennel to house strays. The Animal Control Department strongly urges spaying and neutering of all pets.

GIS

The Geographic Information System Division is responsible for: converting paper tax maps into digital parcel maps linked to the tax administration database, identifying sources of land management data and organize the information into usable layers, maintain an atlas of land based information in digital form, and coordinate, develop and manage the work plan, training and resources with local governments and County departments

Land Description

Responsibilities of the Land Description Division include: creation and maintenance of the County Tax Mapping System, maintaining tax descriptions together with name and address changes, maintaining the house numbering program, and coordinating the remonumentation program.

Human Services

There are various other entities, some tied to the County via the budget, others not, that need to be mentioned. A summary of their operations will not be given here, rather they should be contacted directly: Family Independence Agency, Public Health, Community Mental Health, Friend of the Court, Intermediate School District, Public Transit, Region IV Agency on Aging, Road Commission, Southwest Michigan Commission, and the Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency.

Public Transportation

Currently, the Van Buren Public Transit can service customers anywhere within Van Buren County and offers the following services:

- Dial-A-Ride: curb to curb service within the Paw Paw and South Haven areas Monday through Friday.
- Countywide: 24-hour Call ahead/reservation within the boundaries of Van Buren County.
- Contract: priority transportation services to agencies for their clients. Charges vary due to need assessment of services to be provided.
- Special Services: providing transportation services to groups and organizations, etc. within Van Buren County.

Currently, the county Transit Board oversees the public transit system, with some oversight from the BOC, and it is funded through state and federal dollar. However, the current public transit system is undergoing a review to determine how to best serve and public in the future and how services will be funded. After this review, services are likely to be significantly altered.

For more information contact Van Buren Public Transit at 610 David Walton Drive, Bangor, MI 49013 or call toll free 1-800-828-2015.
http://vbco.org/public_transit.asp

In addition to public transit, the county is served by a network of interstate and highway roads, as well as airports and passenger trains. Area airports include: Gerald R. Ford International (Grand Rapids), Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International, Capital City (Lansing), Southwest Michigan Regional (Benton Harbor), South Bend Regional, Midway and O'Hare International (both in Chicago), and many smaller airstrips for private craft. Area Amtrak stops include: Bangor, Kalamazoo, Dowagiac, Niles, South Bend, Elkhart and multiple stops in the Chicago area.

Recreation

Van Buren County Museum

Operated by the Van Buren County Historical Society, the Van Buren County museum is housed in the historic 1884 county poorhouse on Red Arrow Highway in Hartford. The museum contains three floors of historical items, a replica of a log cabin and a blacksmith works.

The museum is open Wednesday and Saturday from 10:00 am until 4:00 pm and on Sunday from 1:00 pm until 5:00 pm.

Van Buren County Fairgrounds

Approximately 80 acres of Van Buren County property have been leased out to the county fairboard for 50 years in order to host the Van Buren County Youth Fair. The lease was most recently renewed in 1970. At the time of the board's acquisition of the property, it was bare land. However, through volunteer efforts, many improvements have been made. A campground and buildings have been added, and various structures and electrical systems have been renovated. In 2001, the board purchased and planted approximately 75 trees from a nursery auction in order to add shade to the grounds. Asphalt was added in 2005 to ensure handicap accessibility. Funding for purchases is primarily derived from fair revenues. However, the board has recently applied for 501 C3 status, which will allow for grant funding applications.

Each July, the 6-day youth fair draws approximately 50,000 attendees, not including special admittance for Seniors, Ladies, and Kids days. In 2005, there were approximately 600 4-H exhibitors and an additional 400 open-class exhibits. While the fairgrounds do not have a permanent main stage amphitheater, unique features of the land provide for a natural amphitheater with hillside seating for main entertainment events. Additional information on the Van Buren County Youth Fair can be found at: <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/vanburen/4hfair.htm>.

Recreational opportunities abound in Van Buren County. In addition to the museums and historical sites (including the County Courthouse), there are numerous outdoor activities available from trails to camping to beaches.

Trails

Kal-Haven/Van Buren Trails

The Kal-Haven Trail is a 33.5 mile long linear multi-use trail that links Kalamazoo, a major southwest Michigan city, to South Haven, a Lake Michigan resort area.

The trail starts in South Haven on North Bailey Avenue and ends in Kalamazoo on 10th Street.

The route of the Kal-Haven Trail originally was a railroad completed in 1870. The railroad bed has been converted to a trail with a limestone/slag surface. It is usable for all non-motorized bicycles, hiking, and snowmobiling (when there is a 4-inch snow base). In 2004 Van Buren County obtained a use permit to operate and maintain The Kal-Haven Trail Sesquicentennial State Park. Van Buren County continues to operate the trail under this permit.

There are two staffed locations on the trail. The trailhead near Kalamazoo on 10th Street and the trailhead in South Haven on North Bailey Avenue.

Hours of Operation: 8:00 AM to 10:00 PM, 7 days a week. Trail fees are no longer required to access the Kal-Haven or the Van Buren Trails.

Due to the uncertainty of trail funding, we still, however, need your support. Donations can be made to the Friends of the Kal-Haven Trail. This organization is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that has supported the trail for years by financing many projects along the trail. Contact information for the Friends of the Kal-Haven Trail is as follows:

Friends of the Kal-Haven Trail, www.friendsofkalhaventrail.org
c/o Van Buren County Road Commission, PO Box 156, Lawrence, MI 49064

The Van Buren Trail runs through open farmland, blueberry fields, dense brush and wooded areas. This creates a nice, but challenging ride that is more suitable to mountain bikes. The width of the trail varies from 10 to 18 feet.

The South Haven Trailhead is located on Lovejoy Street next to the water tower. To find the trailhead, take LaGrange Street to Aylworth Avenue (next to South Haven High School across from McDonald's). Go west on Aylworth Avenue to Kalamazoo Street. Go South on Kalamazoo Street to Lovejoy Avenue. The trail is a 0.1 miles to the west on Lovejoy Avenue on the south side of the street. The City of Hartford trailhead is located on Prospect Street. Take North Center Street from light at West Main Street. Go north about 0.3 mile to Prospect Street (across from the High School). Go west on Prospect about 0.2 miles (just over the railroad tracks). The trail is on the south side of the street.

Thousands of local residents and tourists use the trails each year. Many youth, non-profit, and recreational organizations request to use the trails each year, often for multi-day rides. Through the partnership efforts of the various groups who operate and have special interests in the trails, operations should run smoothly for years to come.

Bangor/South Haven Heritage Water Trail

Who We Are: The Bangor/South Haven Heritage Water Trail Association is volunteer group working to maintain a canoe and kayak trail encompassing 21 miles of the South Branch of the Black River between the cities of Bangor and South Haven in Van Buren County, Michigan.

Mission: To protect and present the scenic beauty and the heritage along the Black River between Bangor and South Haven.

The water trail is still being developed. Click [here](#) to read a trail description. Numerous workdays have taken place to create a pathway through the logjams. There are pathway trimming days for which you can volunteer. We also host paddle events; we'll love to have you join us on the river!

Please note: *Portions of the trail have NOT been developed, Expect many obstructions and portages. County Road 687 downstream to CR 380 is currently very challenging with no way to exit the river until CR 380. This section would not be advised for family paddling.*

When completed, signs along the route will educate and inform trail users about local history and the environment. The trail will provide creative ways for people to enjoy nature and history while promoting environmental awareness, local tourism, and economic development.

http://www.vbco.org/water_trail.asp

Camping

There are many campgrounds, both public and private, in and around Van Buren County that provide ample opportunity for recreation. One of the most popular is the Van Buren State Park.

The Van Buren State Park offers approximately 400 acres of land located along the Lake Michigan shoreline in northern Van Buren County. The focal points of the park are its high dune formations and one mile of sandy beach. Van Buren became a state park in May of 1965 when the original 167-acre plot was purchased from the Harry LaBar Drake family. Since then two other land purchases have been made to make up the current park (<http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/>). A map of the campground can be seen by typing the following URL into an internet browser:
http://www.michigandnr.com/Publications/PDFS/RecreationCamping/van_buren_map.pdf.

Waterways, Wineries, and More

The county's abundance of rivers, lakes, and ponds allow for water sports, such as skiing and tubing, boating, and fishing. Not the least of these bodies of water is Lake Michigan, of which Van Buren County hosts approximately 26 miles. Thousands of tourists and residents take advantage of water recreation each summer.

In addition to waterways, Van Buren hosts nearly a dozen golf courses, as well as two raceways that offer county residents and visitors the chance to participate and watch sporting events.

Prime soils in the county allow for grape growing, which provides ample opportunity for winemaking. Several wineries in and near Van Buren County produce wine and offer tours of the facilities. See www.vbco.org/wines.asp for more information.

With so many natural resources in the county, from farmland that produces specialty crops to the Great Lakes, there is ample opportunity for celebration. Festivals are offered throughout the county and throughout the year, providing opportunities for residents and tourists to enjoy good company, entertainment, and local resources.

Additionally, the county supports the development of local recreation plans in order for local units of government to identify existing and future parkland, open space, and recreation areas and needs, recommend specific projects that could address these needs, and identify policies (including site selection and design review) and financing options to assist with implementation and management of projects. Such plans can also include maps to assist with decision-making for future land acquisitions.

On December, 13, 2011, Van Buren County adopted the Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan. This document gives a more complete synopsis of opportunities and the current status of recreation in the county. You can view the document on the county's website at http://www.vbco.org/vbcpc_plans.asp

Chapter 7 – Recommendations and Goals

In conclusion, Van Buren County is committed to understanding its demographic characteristics, natural landscape, services offered, and the state of its economy. Through the gathering and interpretation of data, the planning commission, county officials, and others can increase awareness of their surroundings and strategically plan to meet current and future needs for sustainable communities.

In order to assist Van Buren communities effectively plan to achieve their goals, the county planning commission promotes the use of smart growth techniques, coordinated planning, and continuing education.

Smart Growth

“Smart growth” is a term that is often misconstrued. Many people falsely believe that smart growth initiatives produce overly dense, rather costly designs or that smart growth is actually a no growth policy. This is not the case. Smart growth is a means of developing that seeks to boost the economy, protect the environment, and preserve or improve quality of life for residents. Smart growth promotes flexibility and encourages reinvesting in cities, creating compact, walkable, transit-oriented communities.

In 2003, the Michigan Land Use Council developed a report entitled, “Michigan’s Land, Michigan’s Future.” In it, ten tenets of smart growth were identified. They are as follows:

- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
- Create walkable neighborhoods.
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
- Mix land uses.
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.
- Take advantage of compact building design.

According to the Victoria Transport Policy Institute (2005) out of British Columbia, the benefits of smart growth are multifaceted. In the economic sphere, smart growth can reduce development, public service, transportation costs; increase

service efficiency; and support industries that depend on high quality environments, such as tourism and farming.

Socially, benefits include improved transportation options and mobility, particularly for non-motorized transportation; improved housing options; enhanced sense of community; preservation of cultural and historical resources; and increased physical exercise and health. In “smart” communities, services are better in terms of quantity and quality.

Environmental benefits include green space and habitat preservation, reduced air and water pollution, and increased energy efficiency.

Communities that use smart growth are highly connected and attractive, with minimal land use conflicts. Development decisions are strategic and predictable. For additional resources visit www.smartgrowth.org.

Coordinated Planning Initiatives

The following Summary of the Coordinated Planning Act was prepared by the Michigan Association of Planning in March 2001, shortly before enactment of the Coordinated Planning Act, and is also available at vbco.org/planningeduc0154.asp.

Michigan’s four existing planning enabling acts date back to 1931. Very few changes have been made since their adoption. The existing laws do not address the planning issues and problems of today. The proposed Coordinated Planning Act would take the three existing planning enabling acts (for cities, villages, townships, and counties) and create one unified Coordinated Planning Act which provides the mechanisms and tools for a local government to address today’s planning-related issues.

The lack of integrated and coordinated planning has been called by several state level reports the greatest threat to Michigan’s environment and to a sustainable economy. The Coordinated Planning Act would establish a process and incentives for cooperative, coordinated and compatible planning while preserving home rule principles and the right to local determination for land use planning and decision-making.

The Coordinated Planning Act would provide a clear and comprehensive set of purposes for planning. It borrows ideas from many of the successful statutes in other states but it is not modeled after any of them. It is not a “one size fits all” planning act, but fits Michigan’s unique governmental structure, offering different types of plan options to meet the wide variety of community types, population sizes, capabilities and needs in Michigan. It even provides for the voluntary creation of a joint planning commission by two or more contiguous units of government.

The proposed Coordinated Planning Act does not require a state land use plan, nor is it a “top down” approach to planning, but it clearly defines the roles of each level of government (local, county, region, state) as they

relate to coordinated planning. It would establish a process for coordination of all related entities with plans within a community (like a DDA, Historic District Commission, airport authority, etc.), as well as between contiguous communities, with the county, the region and with affected state and federal agencies.

The coordinated planning process would require notice to all these affected entities that a community is going to prepare or amend a plan, and would require a draft copy of the plan or amendment be sent for review and comment. All comments must be responded to and attached as an appendix to a plan. The governing body of the local unit of government, county or region proposing the plan would retain the right to final approval of the plan.

Communities that choose to plan would have 7 years to come into conformance with the new Act (the existing planning enabling acts would be repealed after 7 years). It would establish incentives for developing and maintaining a plan including a state grant program for 7 years; initial funding of regional and county data collection and mapping to be used by all jurisdictions, grants for the preparation of local plans, and state technical assistance and data sharing.

The Coordinated Planning Act would establish the minimum contents of and a menu of different types of plans ranging from a basic future land use plan to sophisticated growth management and redevelopment plans. Plans would be labeled based on their contents. It includes implementation authority to address contemporary planning issues.

Plans prepared under the Coordinated Planning Act would be required to have a 20-year focus and be reviewed every 5 years. Plans could be amended not more than once a year.

The Coordinated Planning Act would place considerable emphasis on infrastructure planning and coordination of infrastructure decisions at all levels of government. It would require the adoption, and annual update of a six-year capital improvements program (CIP) to implement a plan adopted under the Act. The CIP would be based on an analysis of the land use plan and its requirements for public facilities and services to support the quality of life (as measured by level of service) as envisioned in the land use plan. The CIP cannot be a “wish list” but must be “real” (i.e., it must be affordable with a realistic finance plan and time frame for the provision of facilities and services).

The proposed Coordinated Planning Act clearly defines and enhances the role of the planning commission as the entity preparing the plan and reviewing the capital improvements program (CIP) for consistency with the plan. The local governing body adopts the plan and CIP, elevating the status of the plan and CIP as public policy, and bringing a greater level of accountability to the planning process. The proposed Act also requires

that zoning, subdivision regulations, condominium regulations, and capital improvement programs be based on a plan adopted under the Act.

A common and flexible set of requirements for establishing a planning commission are included, as are clear guidelines on planning commission powers, functions and operational responsibilities. Any existing zoning commission or zoning board (not board of appeals) would be eliminated and its powers transferred to the planning commission.

It is the intent of the county planning commission to serve as a coordinating body to help local units of government achieve the goals and underlying purpose of the Coordinated Planning Act. In doing so, it is hoped that local units will collaboratively plan beyond their own borders and begin to feel a part of the bigger picture.

Education and Training

In order for communities to be able to make responsible decisions and to effectively utilize smart growth and coordinated planning initiatives, it is essential for local appointed and elected officials to continue to receive education and training. Workshops and seminars are offered regularly by organizations such as MSUE, Michigan Townships Association (MTA), Michigan Association of Planning (MAP), Michigan Municipal League (MML), Michigan Association of Counties (MAC), and many others. Local units are encouraged to assist their decision-makers to attend these trainings in any way they can.

Communities who plan are communities who succeed. The county planning commission supports local planning efforts and encourages local units to maintain the relevance of their master plans through regular updates. Through the use of smart growth, coordinated planning, and continuing education, Van Buren County can maintain the rural character it desires while providing opportunities for economic development needed to promote diverse and healthy communities.

References

- 2006 Van Buren County, MI Comprehensive Plan.
2001 Red Arrow Corridor Study.
2007 USDA Census of Agriculture.
2003 MI Land Use Council Report: Michigan's Land, Michigan's Future.
Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pokagon_Band_of_Potawatomi_Indians
Smartgrowth Online. www.smartgrowth.org.
State of Michigan. www.michigan.gov.
Todd Litman. 2005. Evaluating Criticism of Smart Growth. Victoria Transport
Policy Institute. <http://www.vtpi.org/sgcritics.pdf>.
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. www.bls.gov.
U.S. Census Bureau. www.census.gov.
Van Buren County GIS Department.
W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. www.upjohninst.org
SWMPC Comprehensive Economic Development Study 2012.

Appendix

County PDR Ordinance and Local Program Information